

ABRA OF POICTIERS

M.Ames

LIBRARY

Brigham Young University
RARE BOOK COLLECTION

Rare

PR

6001

.M12

A27

1900

3 1197 22963 6524



BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY



ABRA OF POICTIERS

ABRA OF POICTIERS

A STORY OF
THE DAYS OF S. HILARY

BY

M. E. AMES

London

JAMES NISBET & CO., LIMITED

21 BERNERS STREET

1900

Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & Co.
At the Ballantyne Press

UPB

TO
THE MEMORY OF
MY BELOVED PARENTS
THIS LITTLE VOLUME
IS AFFECTIONATELY AND REVERENTLY
DEDICATED

P R E F A C E

IT has been remarked by a recent writer on Church History that Hilary of Poitiers has never been appreciated. And yet, at the same time, few among the early Fathers have had higher plaudits bestowed upon them; not only has the Church of Rome canonised him, but St. Jerome has styled him the Rhone of eloquence, a tree in God's garden, who helped to build up the Church of God. Rufinus—A confessor of the Catholic faith. The Duc de Broglie—The Athanasius of Gaul. Pope Pius IX.—A doctor of the universal Church.

How can we reconcile these seeming contradictions? Only by a consideration of the fact that, either by design or from negligence, his writings have never been given in any extended form to the ordinary reader. A close acquaintance with the works of this eminent bishop of the fourth century would suggest the former rather than the latter of these conclusions to be correct, and this is to some extent borne out by the existence of a collection of

St. Hilary's works to be seen any day in the library of the British Museum, containing many original thickly-inked erasures made by the hands of the inquisitors in the Middle Ages. But whether the writings of this man of God have, or have not been, purposely withheld, the fact remains indubitable, that for beauty of language, spirituality of tone, and loyalty to Scriptural teaching, St. Hilary of Poitiers has been surpassed by few, if by any, of the early Church writers. His varied commentaries, letters, and treatises might well be compared to a beautiful garden, hitherto the resort of the favoured few, with its wealth of blossom forming a very *embarras des richesses*, from which the Author has ventured to gather a fragrant cluster, and in presenting the same to the reader, earnestly hopes that he or she may thereby be tempted to explore for themselves the beautiful retreat in which they grew.

The Author further begs to state that the story contained in the following pages is, in all its main points, historical, as are also for the most part the names and characters introduced. The words and comments of Hilary are, moreover, construed, many of them for the first time, directly from the Latin folio of Dom Coustant. Should this present volume meet with a favourable reception, it is intended that

it should form the first of a series of kindred works on early Church history.

In conclusion, the Author's indebtedness to the following writers is gratefully acknowledged:—
Petrus Coustant, "St. Hilarii, Opera et Vita";
"Eusebius," translated by S. Parker; D. A. Neander (Rosse), "Church History"; D. A. Neander, "Lectures on the History of Church Dogmas," translated by Ryland; D. A. Neander, "General History of Church Rites," translated by J. Torry; J. A. W. Neander, "The Life of Jesus Christ in its Historical Development," translated by Macintosh and Blumenthal; "St. Hilary of Poitiers and St. Martin of Tours," by J. G. Cazenove, D.D.; "Annales Typographiques," Maittore; "La Vieille France," by Robida; "Histoire de la Gaule sous l'Administration Romaine," A. Thierry; J. A. Dorner (translated by W. D. Somers), "First Four Centuries of the Development of the Doctrines of Christ"; Dean Farrar's "Lives of the Early Fathers"; Larousse, "Dictionnaire Universel"; *Encyclopædia Britannica*; Jacquemin, "Iconographie du Costume"; "Histoire des Gaulois," Victor Drury; "Antiquities," A. de Compte.

ABRA OF POICTIERS

CHAPTER I

THERE is no more lovely spot in all Poitou than the Blossac, nor a finer and more extensive panorama than the view from its heights. Immediately to the north-west lies the town proper of Poitiers. The streets are tortuous and irregular, and most of them steep, some formed entirely of rough stone steps ; but whatever uncomfortable results may accrue from a nearer acquaintance, they look picturesque enough from the distance, which, it must be confessed, in this instance, lends enchantment to the scene. The structures are, however, very beautiful, most of them of ancient date, including churches, convents, schools, municipal buildings, &c. All the efforts of a ruthless vandalism have not succeeded in entirely eliminating the evidences of a venerable antiquity, still dominating some of these edifices, the very floors of which, to-day echoing to the *sabots* of the market-women, were once trodden by Roman sandals.

The town is girdled by the Clain, which, strengthened by its confluence with the Boire, threads its

emerald banks like a stream of silver ; this river, with its fertile embankment, its seven handsome bridges and extensive boulevards, forms a striking and almost unrivalled feature in the landscape.

To the east of the Blossac are seen all that remains of the former ramparts, which surrounded the ancient city, and following the line of sight northward beyond the Pont-neuf may be caught a glimpse of the druidical remains of a Dolmen—the famous Pierre levée over which antiquaries have fought and ethnologists raged, and which is partly no doubt accountable for the theory that identifies the Pictavi of Gaul with the Picts of Scotland.

To the south the eye is refreshed by the beautiful avenue of La Course, at the present period the resort principally of the faded gentility of the neighbourhood, and of its rising generation with attendant *bonnes* and *gouvernantes*, but formerly the Longchamps of the West, through whose sylvan arcades the beauty and fashion of the *noblesse ancienne*, powdered and patched, drove in stately equipages.

The park is terminated by the *chemin-de-fer* from Paris to Bordeaux ; and where once the forest shades resounded to the song of the nightingale and the squirrel's chatter, an almost ceaseless succession of rushing trains seem to be shrieking out in discordant notes the triumph of modern invention over a romantic and quiescent past.

But although the lover of nature leaves nearly all

that has charmed him behind, as he descends the green slopes of the Blossac, the antiquary enters upon a very storehouse of delight, which meets him almost at every turn of the roughly paved streets. True, the houses of the modern Pictavians are small and vulgar, the seats of their aristocracy numerous and insignificant, and the dwellings of the peasants poor and squalid ; yet what are modern habitations to the savant who can feast his eyes on the ruins of the mighty amphitheatre with its remains of sixty tiers of seats, capable of accommodating 40,000 sitting and 12,000 standing spectators, or what reck he of running gutters and their noisome smells as he traces the magnificent proportions of the ancient nave of St. Jean, with its wonderful supporting columns, or wanders through the aisles of St. Peter's, once a heathen temple of the first century. We might follow him and humbly venture to share his transports as he gazes on the ancient aqueduct and Arch of Paragny, or bends over the monuments in the renowned Roman burying-ground, and for a hundred thousandth time endeavours to unravel the sense of the inscriptions, but fearing to exhaust both time and patience, we leave our happy man of ancient science tramping up and down over the thick uneven stones of this city of rocks, and waving the wand, entrusted to our unworthy hand, we transport our readers and ourselves to a summer day, fifteen and a half centuries ago, when the ruins over which the

archæologist of to-day pours his libation of reverence, were shining in all their former peerless loveliness and grandeur ;—when La Dune wore her crown of forest foliage, and when the first pure beams of Christianity were permeating the vine-clad hills and flowery valleys of Poitiers, revealing to prince and peasant alike the Divine mystery of the ages, “ God manifest in the flesh.”

The system of society among the Pictavians of the fourth century was eminently patriarchal. Like the lairds or head-men of Scotland surrounded by their clans, the nobles of the community dwelt in the midst of their retainers or followers. The mansions of the former were very handsome, and were surrounded by extensive grounds composed chiefly of vineyards and orange groves, and were generally approached by a large paved courtyard, with a fountain in the centre. The dwellings of the latter, on the contrary, were of the most primitive description ; they were generally round, and built of strong wooden stakes, thickly thatched with reeds or grass ; the floors were of dried earth or mud, the roofs were conical, with a hole in the centre for the smoke to emerge.

Paganism still lingered amidst all classes, though many among the inhabitants of Pictavium had received a knowledge of the true faith ; these by the purity of their lives and doctrine, were attracting serious attention to the religion they professed.

But the dark shadow of Arianism, which (with many other base corruptions) was destroying the purity of the Faith in the Eastern Churches, was also affecting the spread of Christianity in the Western colonies of the empire. The report of the persecution and quarrels which were convulsing Christendom in the capitals was deterring many from entering a Church torn by rival factions ; and the little body of earnest and sincere believers in Gaul were eagerly looking forward to the advent of a leader who would consolidate their own ranks and reassure the wavering.

Such a leader had arisen among the Eastern Churches in Athanasius of Alexandria. At the time of which we write, this renowned champion for the truth of the Godhead of the blessed Trinity was in enforced exile in Rome, by the order of Constantius, the Emperor of the Eastern world. Arianism, however, was by no means the only enemy the faithful had to fear at that period. Like the old fable of the traveller's cloak, that which the storm of adversity had been unable to effect, the sun of prosperity had achieved, and the Church which had triumphed under the persecution of Diocletian had succumbed before the smile of Constantine, and the spirit of worldliness and error, which has assumed such gigantic proportions in our own day, had already appeared in more than embryo before the close of the fourth century of her existence.

Such was the state both of the Church abroad, and of society among the Christians and Pagans of Pictavium, in the year of grace 345.

In the courtyard of a handsome mansion, a lady was bending over the margin of the fountain. Although youthful in appearance, she wore the dress of a noble Roman matron; her attire, however, while costly in material, was entirely unadorned with jewels, worn at that period in great excess, and no pearls gleamed amid her dark flowing locks. Her figure was graceful, and so gentle was the expression of her beautiful features that there appeared nothing astonishing in the sight of the golden doves fluttering around her, alighting on her shoulders, and even allowing her to smooth their gleaming plumage with her long taper fingers.

Engrossed in the train of thoughts which occupied her mind, she did not hear an approaching footstep on the marble floor of the court, until the sudden flutter of the feathered wings of her companions, as they flew in sudden alarm to the gabled roof above, apprised her of the fact; she turned quickly, as an old man of noble bearing approached her, and a bright and tender smile lighted up her beautiful features, as, with a low reverence, she stepped forward to greet him.

“Welcome, dear father,” she said — her voice was soft, and she spoke with the cultured Roman accent — “is Hilary, my husband, with you?”

"He tarries not far behind, Rhoda;¹ indeed, we have had a weary hunt, and all for nothing. Well, it is better to hunt for boars than for Christians, which latter sport has been within my memory, and I am not sorry in my heart, daughter, that the poor beast hath escaped us; the dogs would have given him but a sorry death. But where is my sunbeam, my Abra?"

"The sun was so hot that I feared it would overpower so tender a blossom; she is resting with her nurse in yonder orange grove, I trust, sleeping."

"Let us seek her," said the aged Francarius. "Ah, Rhoda," he continued, as they turned towards the fragrant spot the lady had indicated, "I would that the gods had spared me my Marcella a little longer, so that her eyes might have beheld our treasure, before they were closed in perennial darkness." The old man sighed, drearily; while a slight flush rose to the fair cheek beside him.

"Perennial!" she repeated softly, "is it so, dear father?"

"Yes, my daughter, in spite of all Plato, Cicero, or the half-Christian Origen, hath said, death is an eternal nothingness, and no man can disprove it. I shall never behold my Marcella, the most gifted, the most virtuous among women, again!" and a tear fell on the flowing beard of the bereaved husband.

¹ See Appendix, I.

Rhoda did not answer ; unconsciously, her eyes wandered upward to the deep-blue sky, and it almost seemed to her that words she had listened to not many hours since were inscribed across them in letters more golden than the sunshine, "Them who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him."

They had reached the grove by this time, and the vision that met their eyes chased, for the moment, all sadder and more solemn thoughts from the hearts of both mother and grandfather, as they gazed upon it in speechless love and admiration. On a heap of rich, soft cushions, lay a beautiful child, of about five years of age, fast asleep. The gentle nurse, a young Christian slave, seated beside her young charge, had removed the sandals from the tiny feet, and had partly uncovered the rounded limbs so that the gentle breeze might fan them. Few sights in this weary, sin-stained world are sweeter, and perhaps more elevating, than that of a sleeping child, and when this is enhanced by the rare beauty of the little sleeper, and by such exquisite surroundings as that of a flowering orange grove, with the June sunbeams flickering through dark-green branches, we may, perhaps, imagine the effect of that living picture on those two simple, loving hearts as they gazed upon their darling, side by side.

The venerable Francarius was the first to break the silence.

"My Rhoda," he said in a low voice, "if the

propitious fates would, at this moment, lift the veil which hides their purpose from our eyes, what future wouldst thou fain see for yon babe?"

Rhoda raised her dark eyes to her father-in-law's face; as she did so they slowly filled with tears, and she remained for a moment silent.

"Speak, daughter," continued the old man kindly, laying his hand gently upon her shoulder. "What boon does thy mother-heart crave for thy peerless child?"

The lady's eyes fell, and her lips quivered.

"Were I to tell the desire of my heart for my Abra, it might anger thee, father."

"Surely not, my daughter; name it."

"I would, then, that my pearl, my treasure, might become——"

"Become what?" said the old man, again smiling as he saw his daughter still hesitate. "Perchance an empress; forsooth, she is fair enough to warrant such ambition; is it an empress thou wouldst thy daughter might become?"

"Nay, father, I would desire something for my darling greater still!"

"Rhoda, thou ravest! What could yon babe become greater than the empress of the Cæsars?"

"My father—a Christian."

CHAPTER II

THROUGH the shades of a thick forest a train of hunters were slowly wending their way. The oppressive heat of the day and the failure of their chase—for the poor beast they had been harrowing and hunting from sunrise had at last taken to covert (impenetrable even to the strong, fierce boar-hounds, led in chains by black slaves, which followed the group of horsemen)—had had a subduing effect upon their usually high spirits, and when one of their number proposed a halt, the suggestion was unanimously approved of. The horses, from which the riders had dismounted, were accordingly led away by slaves to some distant grazing, and the riders, about a dozen in number, threw themselves upon the mossy carpet of the forest, beneath the shadow of a magnificent beech tree. Unconsciously they seemed to group themselves round the young man who had in the first instance proposed a halt, and, youthful as his appearance was, notwithstanding his six-and-twenty years, there was an expression in the thoughtful face, with its noble features and clear-cut jaw, which denoted unusual strength and firmness of disposition, and all those numberless characteristics which go to form a leader

among men. There was, however, a dreaminess in the full dark eyes, and almost womanly curves of gentleness around the flexible mouth, which softened the look of sternness that noble face might otherwise have worn.

"Now, Hilary, tell us thy last speculation," exclaimed one of the group, a man somewhat older than his companions. "My Martin will never forgive me if I bring not aught of the result of thy latest religious investigation back to Tours¹ with me. Who is in the ascendant now—Plato or Origen?"

"A truce with such solemnities," exclaimed a lively youth, about seven years Hilary's junior. "Is it not enough to have lost the finest boar in the forest, without having to endure the endless quibbles of those ancient disputers, and all about nothing?"

"An thou callest it about nothing," answered Hilary, as he lay backwards on the soft moss, his hands folded beneath his head, gazing up through the leafy tracery into the deep-blue sky above; "an thou callest it about nothing, I disagree with thee, Phaco."

"I care not a jot whether it is something or nothing they quarrelled over," answered the youth sullenly. "I would that all their disputations, Christian or heathen, whichever like you call them, were sunk into the ocean, so that I might have struck this spear into yonder goodly boar."

There was a general burst of good-natured

¹ See Appendix, 2.

laughter at the youth's angry humour, and the father of Martin again spoke.

"Since the doctors do not please thee, Phaco, what thinkest thou of the news I have had this morning from Lyons, brought by my worthy cousin's chamberlain. It will pleasure you all to hear it."

"What is it? tell us, Martin," exclaimed a chorus of voices.

"There is to be a gladiatorial show there next month in honour of the imperial Constans' birthday."

A shout of delight arose from every lip, with the exception of Hilary's.

"Bespeak us places by this same trusty post, Martin," exclaimed the young men, gathering eagerly around him. "Come, Hilary, thou surely wilt join us. The fair Rhoda will consent to such a brief separation, in order to give thee so much pleasure. There doth not chance a gladiators' show every day of one's life."

"The gods be thanked—no," was Hilary's quiet answer, without changing his position.

"Why speakest thou thus?" exclaimed Phaco, turning upon him in a blaze of anger, while others of his companions stared upon him in blank astonishment.

"I speak as I feel," was the young man's answer, in the same quiet voice, but rising to his feet as he spoke, and surveying the perturbed faces around him.

"As thou dost feel; and how is that?" was the contemptuous query of another of the group.

"Very much as the doomed gladiators do themselves, I suspect—as a human being, not yet tired of life."

There was a perfect roar of derisive laughter, in which even the voice of the elder Martin faintly chimed.

"Thou art reading Origen to some purpose," he exclaimed, while a flush of anger mounted to his cheek; "I would advise thee, Hilary, my young friend, to content thyself with Plato, a safer and less revolutionary writer, and one who, at all events, lacketh the indecency to deride the noblest and the most ancient of our imperial sports."

"What can thy wisdom expect of a man who leaves his companions at the age of twenty to enter upon the solemnities and responsibilities of matrimony," was Phaco's scornful exclamation, "he ought——"

"Not to neglect his fair lady by tarrying a moment longer from her gentle presence," answered Hilary with quiet dignity. "My friends, I bid you farewell," and with a courteous bow towards the group of hunters, he raised a silver whistle, as he spoke, and as its signal floated through the glades of the forest a slave promptly appeared, leading a handsome and richly caparisoned steed, which Hilary mounted with agility and grace, and trotting briskly forward was soon lost to sight in the luxuriant forest foliage.

“By the gods, there goeth a youth of strange metal,” exclaimed he of Tours, “and yet I would I possessed somewhat more of his merit. I would not for Cæsar’s crown tell my boy of his disfavour of our ancient sports, or I should have Martin crowing as loudly as he, and setting himself up against our most honoured institution, because, forsooth, slaves must suffer and die therein.”

In the meanwhile Hilary, attended by his retinue, rode thoughtfully onward beneath the overhanging branches of the forest trees ; his meditations, however—the subject of which we may partially guess—were suddenly put to flight by the ringing sound of horses’ hoofs rapidly approaching, and the next instant a horseman rode in sight. As they came thus unexpectedly face to face, both men simultaneously sprang from their saddles, and hardly waiting for a slave to run forward to seize the reins they flung to him, rushed into each other’s arms in a mutual embrace.

“Rufus !”

“Hilary !”

Well might undisguised admiration blend with the latter’s gaze at the figure before him. He was a man very slightly past the meridian of life, of magnificent physique ; his huge frame was habited in the dress of a centurion of the period, five enormous bronze medals adorned his ample chest. A necklace of gilded copper, to which two rings of the same

metal were attached by crimson cloth, encircled his throat. His corslet was of a rich brown, parted sufficiently to show a blue embroidered tunic edged with green beneath, cut square to the back and shoulders; his arms were adorned with bracelets almost as massive as the rings, and his sandals reached considerably above the instep; the spear-head he carried in his right hand was also of gilded copper; a green cap adorned with gold only partially covered the crisp brown curls with which nature had adorned his noble head;¹ his face was clean shaven, his features straight and regular, their military expression softened by the benign gentleness that gleamed from the depths of his large, dark eyes.

"Welcome! thrice welcome! my good Rufus!" was Hilary's delighted greeting, "this will indeed pleasure Francarius and my gentle Rhoda! What news from Rome, Rufus?" he continued anxiously, as the two friends, having remounted their steeds and emerged from the forest shades, were now riding, side by side, up the steep vine-bordered road towards Hilary's beautiful villa.

"The news is sad and black enough, my friend, and will well keep, if so thou willest it."

"Nay, acquaint me therewith now," was the younger man's answer; "I would not sadden the last days of the noble Francarius nor my Rhoda's young heart with aught that might be avoided. So

¹ See Appendix, 3.

tell me thy news, friend, be it black as one black heart, we wot of, can make it."

"There is a word," answered the centurion, dropping his huge voice almost to a whisper and glancing cautiously around him, "among the words of Life, which our founder, the worthy Novatian¹ of blessed memory, taught his disciples to be the word of the living God, which saith, 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed,' and I wot, my noble Hilary, that word will ere long be verified before the eyes of all men."

"What mean you—not——"

"Ay, robe the fiend in the imperial purple, an thou wilt; crown him with the diadem of the Cæsars; place the world's sceptre in his blood-stained hand, yet is murder nought less than murder, and believe me, my friend, wert thou to ask me to name the most miserable man in the Western world to-day, it should not weary me to find the answer."

"Who?"

The reply was breathed so softly that ears less alert than Hilary's would have failed to hear it—

"Constans."

"And by whose hand will he, thinkest thou, fall?"

"By the hand of his minion Magnentius."

"But surely this Magnentius is high in favour with his imperial master, so methinks I heard."

"And thou didst hear truly."

¹ See Appendix, 4.

"Then — then — wherefore speakest thou thus, most noble Rufus—if—?"

"Mine honoured friend, didst thou but give thyself to the reading of our holy Book—and may Heaven grant that the day may not be far distant when so thou dost," continued the worthy centurion, too much absorbed in his subject to notice the flush that suddenly rose to his companion's cheek,—“wert thou to study the histories contained in the Holy Scriptures, thou wouldst there see verified the principle upon which the Eternal oft-times works with those who sin against light and knowledge; the success which attends the plans and purposes of such men becomes the very means of their destruction. Hilary, our imperial ruler, little recks that the serpent he is nursing in his bosom will sting him to his death.”

“Yet the Emperor is one of you; he is a Christian.”

“Ay, so doth he affect to be, and possesseth a purer doctrine than doth his royal brother, in that he favoureth the brave Athanasius and rejected the teaching of that anti-Christ, Arius.”

“And yet is he as thou truly sayest—a—I hardly dare to speak the word, and it needest not to thee that I should do so, but he is *that*—and yet a Christian.”

“And Satan was an angel, and Judas Iscariot was an apostle, my Hilary. Mere profession of the Christian faith by the lips, or even belief of it with the head, cannot save a man, either from the power or

penalty of sin ; nay, on the contrary part, where it lacketh that true grace of God which can alone change the heart and life, it tendeth oftentimes only to everlasting destruction. But see, is not yon thy fair home rising before us ? ”

Rufus was right ; a turn in the road had brought the riders into sight of the mansion, buried in luxuriant foliage, and with the sun gleaming on its stately roof. As they approached the courtyard, Francarius himself came forward to meet them.

“ My father ! ” exclaimed Hilary, as he leapt from his saddle with his habitual agility, and yet not omitting the usual reverence of the period with which a child always approached his parents, “ behold our esteemed friend Rufus, from the ancient capital, come to honour our poor dwelling with his noble presence ; and I can answer for him that his heart hath not changed towards his old friends, although he hath become a Christian of the Novatianist School since we last met.”

“ Welcome, indeed, my noble Rufus,” exclaimed the old man, embracing his guest, while the slaves led away the horses to the stables, in the rear of the mansion ; “ whoever lives well, prays well ; that is my motto, be it to the ancient gods of our fathers, or to this new god of the Christians.”

“ Nay, friend,” said the centurion gently, but with a deeply solemn accent in his voice, which did not escape the notice of his companions, “ we

Christians worship Him Who is 'from everlasting to everlasting God.' But who comes here?" he exclaimed in a lighter tone, as Rhoda, leading her little daughter by the hand, came forward to meet them.

"Oh, my husband," she exclaimed, "God be praised; my heart misgave me at thy long tarrying," and for a moment she raised her fair face to her husband's, radiant with joy, entirely unconscious of the centurion's presence. The child, however, had observed him, and clung shyly to the folds of her mother's dress.

"My Rhoda, see who is here!" exclaimed the young husband, tenderly kissing the fair face raised to his, and lifting his little daughter in his arms; "behold our beloved Rufus, thy departed father's most honoured friend," he added in a lower voice. With a cry of delight the lady started forward, and seizing the huge hand of the soldier, raised it reverently to her soft lips, while tears of joy sparkled in her beautiful eyes. The next instant she had taken the little Abra from her husband's arms, and led her to her guest. The little creature, assured by something her wondering, childish eyes read in that noble countenance, held out her arms, and smiled confidently up into his face. The centurion lifted her tenderly, and she nestled, with a merry, childish laugh, on his breast, and began to toy with his shining rings.

"Rufus," exclaimed the young mother in a slightly tremulous voice, "thou art a Christian, bless my child."

A look of unspeakable, surprised delight stole over the stern features of the Roman soldier, and for a moment some strong emotion seemed to deprive him of the power of speech. The next instant, however, he had recovered himself, and laying one hand tenderly on the child's clustering curls, he raised his eyes to the deep blue sky above.

"Oh, sweet and blessed Jesus!" he said, so low and reverend was his voice, that unconsciously every head bent low, while a look of awe crept into the dark, childish eyes raised to his, "Thou who more than three hundred years ago didst take the little ones into Thine arms and didst bless them, ay, and the mothers who did bring them to Thee, bless this fair babe we bring to Thee to-day; lay Thine unseen tender Hand of Love upon her childish head, and claim her henceforth as Thine own; take her into Thine arms, beloved Jesus, and shelter her there for ever." And the soft, fervent Amen which floated from the shadow of the orange grove, near at hand, was re-echoed by all, even by the pagan lips of old Francarius.

"These be strange times," said the old patrician, as, about an hour afterwards, the family, with the exception of little Abra, reclined round the festal board prepared in honour of their guest. "Rhoda can form no greater wish for her peerless blossom than that she should become a Christian; and thou, Rufus, when petitioned for a blessing, canst soar no

higher, and can delve no deeper, than, what appeareth to my judgment, to be the seeking of an invisible gift from an invisible Hand."

"Mine honoured friend," was the soldier's answer, "I once thought even as thou. May thine eyes be opened, as mine have been, to see in God's light the truth of those blessed Scriptures, 'the things which are seen are temporal, the things which are not seen are eternal.'"

"And yet," said Francarius, as some hours later he paced the moonlit courtyard in company with his son, the rest of the household, including Rufus, who was wearied with his long ride, having retired to rest—"and yet there are those in high authority, in the Christian Church, both at Rome and in Antioch, who, if my nephew, thy cousin Fabellus, be in the right, would call the prayer we listened to this forenoon the prayer of a heretic."

"Whether or no, my father," was the quiet answer, "I would it might meet with a fulfilment."

"Hilary!" said the old man, while a frown gathered on his usually gentle face, "what meanest thou; surely thou too hast not joined this new, prating sect?"

"Father," and the younger man paused in his walk and cast an affectionate, almost pleading, look into the face now anxiously regarding him, "thou knowest the life I have hitherto led."

"Yes, I know it, and, my son, so far thy manner of

living hath satisfied thy father's ambition for his only son, ay, and that of thy noble departed mother also."

"So hath it not mine, my father ; I have a hunger here," said Hilary, striking his breast, "which nought hath yet appeased ; not even my reverence for thee, the best of fathers, nor the departed Marcella, the most virtuous of mothers, not even my gentle Rhoda, nor my lovely babe, can satisfy the ceaseless craving of my heart ; the ordinary life of my fellows hath become distasteful to me ; my past career of selfish indulgence and pleasure pains me to dwell upon ; the Christian writer Origen——"

"Talk not to me of the blasphemers of the holy gods," answered the old man, the long smouldering indignation in his breast flaming into wrath ; "answer me but one word, my son : Art—thou—a Christian?"

"My father," answered Hilary in a low, sad voice, "I am not, but——"

"But what, my son?"

"I would fain become one."

"That wish can only be attained," answered the aged Francarius, "at the price of thy father's broken heart."

"Mine honoured father, say not so," exclaimed Hilary, throwing himself at the old man's feet, and seizing his hand in both of his ; "thou who hast trained thy son in the paths of virtue and honour, wilt thou deny to him this search after truth, for oh,

my father, doth not thine own most noble heart confess to thee that she dwelleth not, in her white-robed purity, in the faith of our Pagan ancestors?"

"Then where else shall we seek for her, my son?" answered Francarius, in a voice almost as mournful as Hilary's had been but a moment before.

"Within this scroll," the young man replied, rising to his feet, and placing in his father's hand a beautifully transcribed roll, which until now had been concealed within the folds of his toga.

Francarius regarded it in perplexed silence.

"What matter lieth herein?" he at length said, "the exterior is goodly enough!"

"The interior passeth it in value, my father," said Hilary with kindling eye and flushing cheek, "for it containeth naught less than the Psalms of David, the King of Judah, and also the Pentateuch of the ancient law-giver, Moses."

"And how came it in thy hands?"

"Our esteemed Rufus hath brought it from Rome, and hath had the courtesy to present it to thy unworthy son. My father, thou wilt not forbid to him the pleasure of reading so deep a matter."

"Nay, my son," answered the old man gently, "for I will confess to thee that my heart, as thine doth, yearneth for that comfort, which our friend Rufus certified to me is to be found in these sacred writings of the Christians. My son, we will read this fair scroll together."

CHAPTER III

FIVE years had passed away since that June evening when Hilary and his father Francarius had traversed the quiet moonlit courtyard of the fair mansion in that earnest, and ever to remain memorable, conversation recorded in the previous chapter. Many were the changes that had swept over the quiet household since that night, the most striking of them all being that the light of the glorious gospel of the living God had reached the hearts, and transformed the lives of every member of the family, even to little Abra, who still possessed the privileges and penalties pertaining to the position of an only child in a wealthy household, and who reigned all but paramount in the affections of grandfather and parents alike. The little maiden was now a lovely child of ten years of age. The natural sweetness of her disposition was enhanced by careful Christian training, while the extreme vivacity of her childish nature was tempered and sanctified by a clear perception of her Christian faith, and by a real devotion to that glorious Saviour Who, in that fair earthly home, had called a little child unto Him and had taken her in His arms and blessed her.

Rhoda,¹ who had secretly embraced the Christian faith, unfolded to her by the life and lips of her child's gentle nurse, Alva, many years before she had ventured to confess the fact, even to her husband, had truly "grown in grace" through the passing years, and the life and conversation of the still fair Christian matron was richly adorned with that jewel which outrivals all the richest and fairest gems of earth, even "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."

The venerable Francarius, now enfeebled from advancing years, still retained his nobility and gentleness of mind and bearing, and he was never weary of repeating those glorious words of Life which his dim eyes could no longer trace on the precious scroll which had first revealed to him the tender love of his Father in heaven, and the hope of an immortal life beyond the grave. But amongst all the members of that now godly household, no change was more apparent than that which had transformed its young head and ruler, Hilary, from the restless, morbid, and oftentimes melancholy youth, into the stable, God-satisfied, and rejoicing Christian man. The true light had begun to dawn upon his soul, as he, and his father together, had studied the centurion's gift, but it was not until, alone in the depths of the forest, whither, in his hungering and thirsting after God, he had withdrawn from all human surroundings, and

¹ See Appendix, 5.

with the Gospel of St. John for his only companion, that the glorious mystery of godliness, "God manifest in the flesh," was revealed, in all its unutterable splendour and sweetness, to his longing heart, and he had returned to his home resolved with a holy, steadfast purpose, to confess his Lord in the waters of baptism, a purpose shared by those he loved best upon earth.

Three years had now passed away since Hilary and his entire family, with the addition of one or two Christian slaves, had confessed in the baptismal waters, their "death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness."

One of his first acts, after his baptism, had been to write to his young friend Martin, now a soldier in the imperial army, acquainting him with the fact and opening his heart to him concerning the spiritual struggles and sorrows through which he had passed, and of the glorious solution of all his difficulties. The letter ended with a fervent, tender appeal to his friend to give up all for Christ's sake, and to join the glorious army of the Church of the living God. Martin, who was becoming dissatisfied with his life of military service among godless companions, received this communication of his friend with the greatest delight, and at once urged his father to consent to the purchase of his discharge—which the generous and indulgent Martin not only readily granted, but also wrote to Hilary, begging him to receive his son for

a year, as guest in his family, in order that he might prosper by his Christian instruction. The elder Martin's desire on his son's behalf met with a prompt and favourable reply, and on a certain fair evening in October upon which this chapter opens, the highly gifted youth had been for some weeks a welcome guest under Hilary's hospitable roof.

It was, as we have already stated, a beautiful evening in October ; the sun was setting in gorgeous colours, lighting up the interior of the orange grove with its dying splendour, where Hilary and his young friend were seated engaged in earnest conversation. So absorbed were they in the subject which formed the theme of their discussions that they did not observe a dusky Scythian slave rapidly approaching them, until his massive frame blocked up the entrance to their retreat, effectually intercepting the rays of the setting sun. As he made the usual obeisance, he exclaimed, " Tidings, my lord, tidings ! "

" Tidings ! " exclaimed Hilary, as both young men sprang to their feet, " and from whom ? "

" From Rufus the centurion. "

" And where tarrieth his post ? "

" In the courtyard, my lord, awaiting thy noble presence. "

Both friends dashed eagerly forward, and almost instantly came upon a strange and bewildering scene.

The citizens of Poitiers, in their eagerness to

hear the news, regardless of all bounds, were thronging into the courtyard of the mansion and surrounding the figure of a man, whose disordered dress and begrimed countenance, as well as the condition of the poor horse, against whose foam-covered flanks he leant, told, in unmistakable signs, of a journey from the far distance accomplished in hot haste. The clamour of the crowd, their gesticulations as they roughly jostled each other in their eagerness to get nearest to the travel-stained messenger, the barking of the numerous curs which followed their masters' heels, intermingled now and then with the terrified cry of a child borne into the crowd in its mother's arms, presented, indeed, a strange contrast to the usually calm, dignified seclusion of the precincts of that lordly mansion; but neither Hilary nor the excited townspeople seemed to bestow a thought upon their invasion of his premises; in the overpowering interests of tidings from the capital, all other considerations were entirely forgotten.

As Hilary and his guest approached, however, the crowd gave way, and somewhat hushed its clamour, while the wearied messenger, with a respectful military salute, placed a sealed despatch in his hands, saying, in a voice which told of extreme physical exhaustion, "From my noble master, Rufus, to my Lord Hilary."

"This is no doubt for my own private reading,"

he said, as he took the packet from the man's hands ; "but now, my friend, bespeak thy tidings, which concern us all as loyal subjects of Cæsar alike, in order that my minions may conduct thee and thy poor beast to the best refreshment and repast it is within the power of mine house to bestow upon so worthy a post. What tidings dost thou bring from Rome to us of Poictiers ?"

The hush of the crowd had grown so intense, as Hilary ceased speaking, that the man's feeble and exhausted utterance was heard to its further limit.

"There hath been a battle nigh to Gaul, between Cæsar and the followers of the traitor Magnentius. The Imperial army has been defeated and—" The man's voice faltered, while the tension of the crowd grew almost intolerable. "Magnentius has murdered his master—and has been crowned at Rome—in—his—stead."

The effect of such startlingly terrible news upon the excited Pictavians might have been fraught with much danger to the safety and peace of the moment, had it not been somewhat modified by the sudden collapse of the poor post, who, as the last word left his lips, fainted away. Hilary instantly sprang forward to assist to raise him, and, under his directions, the poor fellow was carried into the interior of the mansion, while his weary, faithful steed was led gently away to the stables. Martin lingered with the crowd, and both by his soldierly manner, and that

intense personal influence which became so dangerous a snare, both as regarded himself and others, in his after life, soon succeeded in dispersing them quietly and peacefully, though with many demonstrations of wrathful indignation, to their several homes.

It was not until the expiration of some hours after the scene in the courtyard had taken place, that Hilary, in the presence of his family and that of his guest, broke the seal of the centurion's letter, and read as follows :—

“ To mine honoured and esteemed Hilary,
Rufus greeting in the Lord.

“ That which I foretold thee five years ago, hath come to pass. Constans, the slayer of his brother, hath in his turn been murdered by Magnentius. News hath, however, reached us that Constantius is even now marching forward with an army to justly punish the slayer of his brother, and before this letter shall reach thee by the hands of the trusty post, Philo, a Christian soldier of my guard, the eternal word will be fulfilled, so that of this wicked murderer it shall be written according to the saying of Lamech, the slayer of Cain : ‘ He hath killed a man to his wounding, and a young man to his hurt ; ’ after which event shall Constantius, the pillar of the Arian heretics, reign over the world, and so may we look for persecution once more to overtake the little flock ; and yet, mine Hilary, we need not fear, for the

Good Shepherd shall but fold us the more securely when the tempest shall arise, and as the saintly Paul hath exhorted in his pastoral letter written in the power of the blessed Spirit : ‘ If He be for us, who can be against us ? ’ It will pleasure thee to hear that Athanasius hath been vindicated of all the charges brought against him, and even now is on his way to his flock at Alexandria, albeit he tarrieth at Antioch, where he hath refused all communion with the Bishop Leontius, and preferreth to worship with the despised followers of the saintly Flavian in a poor building which they have erected with their own hands. It hath, however, been reported that the great Cæsar, over-persuaded by his royal sister, the Lady Constantia, looketh with an evil eye upon Athanasius ; the imperial hand is falling also somewhat severely on many of the pastors among the orthodox, as also on us of the Novatianists, and the happy consequence of such persecution is, that a more brotherly feeling, and one in greater accord with the spirit of our blessed Master, is being manifested between these different parties of the one true Church, insomuch that our own Novatianist bishop, Agelius, and many of the orthodox bishops have united in communion and worship.¹

“ And now, my Hilary, receive a word of advice from a friend who loves thee well. The day approacheth, and that rapidly, when, as I have already

¹ See Appendix, 6.

foreshown thee, he whom men style the great Augustus, will snatch the sceptre of the Western world from the hand of his brother's murderer. Be careful to look out for yourselves a leader who shall be such a man, and such a Christian, that he will be able to guide the Churches which are in Gaul through times of difficulty and peril. I have myself met such a man who abideth not a hundred miles from your fair town, a man of noble bearing and of still nobler purpose, one who lacketh not command over his own spirit, and therefore hath power over other men's passions, one who possesseth many gifts and graces, but who heedeth them not, so that he may sit, like the pious Mary of Bethany, at the blessed feet of Christ and listen to His word—if this man, my Hilary, be chosen by thy neighbours as their bishop, do not thou oppose the election of so fit and proper a person to become overseer of the flock which our Master Christ hath purchased with His own Blood. I would fain conclude this mine epistle with the ascription of praise which the pious Flavian hath of late introduced into the worship of God in his conventicle at Antioch.

“ ‘Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.’

“ My greetings to the venerable Francarius, to the fair and virtuous Rhoda, the tender blossom, Abra, and the Church which is in thy house. Fare—thee—well.”

"I would I knew the man of whom our esteemed Rufus speaketh such goodly things," said Hilary musingly, as he laid down the letter, and eagerly scanned the faces of his listeners, as if seeking for some light there, but a somewhat inexplicable smile on Rhoda's downward face, as she toyed with the silken curls of her little daughter, nestling by her side, and a kindling flash in Martin's dark eyes, alone met his searching gaze; he could not see the face of Francarius, for the old patrician had risen from his seat and was standing by his side.

"My Hilary," he said, laying his aged hand softly on his son's head, and with a slight quiver in his voice; "methinks I wot the man well enough."

"Is it so indeed, my father; then wilt thou name him?"

"First, dost thou pass thy word, my son, that thou wilt not oppose his election, by the Church of Poitiers, as their bishop, should it be their desire to appoint him?"

"Surely, my father, I will not oppose such a wholesome choice, but I pray thee name such a godly champion for the truth."

"I do so, my son—Hilary."

CHAPTER IV

THE years that had brought such truly blessed changes to the household of Hilary had also left their mark, although of a different nature, on the life and character of Phaco Varenilla.

The seven years which had passed away since the young nobleman formed one of the hunting party, described in a previous chapter, had wrought an entire transformation in the character and outward demeanour of the once hot-tempered and whimsical, yet generous youth. By the early death of his father he had inherited a magnificent patrimony while still in tender years. An only child, almost worshipped by his mother Claudiola, and with no father to control his naturally passionate temperament, accustomed to admiration from his infancy, and to the exercise of rule and authority from his boyhood, possessing an imperious disposition which had never been thwarted, and a keen intellect which had never been directed into wholesome channels, it cannot be wondered at, that at the age of nineteen Phaco's character had slowly but surely developed into a haughty and shallow selfishness, while his mental attainments were both superficial and coloured by inordinate

conceit. His fond, foolish mother, whose only object in life was to lavish upon her darling every pleasure the world had to offer, had, at his earnest desire, sent him forth with a magnificent retinue, her maternal blessing and almost unlimited wealth, for a three years' sojourn in the capitals and polished resorts of the empire. Both she and her boy, absorbed in the contemplation of the delights this journey was to yield to the young nobleman and his gay companions, were entirely unconscious of the effects it was to produce upon the character and future career of Phaco.

Yet so it was ; the chimerical heights of grandeur and superiority from which this spoilt child of fortune had hitherto looked down, with a pride as lofty as it was absurd, on his associates of Pictavium, now melted into thin air in the princely and cultured atmosphere of Cæsar's Court, and would have left him hopelessly stranded, and the butt of polished irony and sneer, had not his naturally keen sense come to his rescue and taught him instantly to adopt the manners and habits which characterised this higher stratum of society into which he had been permitted to enter.

Phaco had, in fact, found his level, and he at once adjusted his demeanour to this discovery. He took swift mental note that those of his new companions, most noble in birth and highest in the imperial favour, possessed manners entirely untinged by self-assertion in any form, and most accessible in their studied simplicity, and the young neophyte, as a result of

his quick observation and quiet determination, soon rivalled the most cultured among the courtiers, as far as his outward demeanour was concerned.

Shortly before his arrival at Constantinople, Magnentius, the usurper, had been slain by Constantius, who, accordingly, now exercised a sole sway over the Western as well as the Eastern world. Arianism, by this event, had received a powerful and fresh impetus, and was now the fashionable creed professed, undoubtedly by many from conviction, but by a still larger number from a desire to please the Emperor and the imperial ladies.

Phaco, accordingly, threw aside the relics of Paganism to which he adhered, more from indifference to spiritual truth than from any faith in their efficacy, and was openly baptized by the wily Macedonius, who had succeeded the persecuted and eventually strangled Paul in the seat of Constantinople, and had become an ardent Arian; in short, the young nobleman from Poitiers had shown himself possessed of those talents and qualities by which courtiers are made in a remarkable degree. He had sought out Saturninus, his compatriot, the Bishop of Arles, who was also at that time on a visit to the Court at Constantinople and very high in Cæsar's favour, and succeeded in winning his regard to such an extent, that he was admitted into that prelate's confidence, who secured for him by his powerful influence favour not only with Cæsar, but also with the

beautiful Empress, and the still more potent Lady Constantia.¹ Indeed, so rapidly did Phaco rise in favour with the last-named lady, that her regard for the handsome Pictavian youth was thought, by some, to exceed the limits of ordinary friendship.

The three years thus spent in the highest and most cultured society the world could produce had, as has been already stated, effected a striking change on the young traveller, both outwardly, as to his demeanour, and inwardly, as to his character. In respect to the former, a smooth, unruffled courtliness of bearing had displaced the blustering arrogance and domineering haughtiness of his earlier years; but beneath that calm, polished exterior the same passions, intenser in degree, still surged in all their power, and having no longer any outward escape in voice or manner they turned upon the heart and character within, until all that remained of what was once high and noble in his boyish nature disappeared before their hidden but devouring flames.

Such was Phaco of Poictiers, when, at the expiration of his sojourn in the empire, he at length, after an absence of nearly four years, arrived once again at his paternal mansion. Even as Claudiola clasped him to her heart, with the quick observation of affection, the doting eye of his mother at once perceived the mysterious and subtle change which had passed over her darling since he had torn himself

¹ See Appendix, 7.

from her arms, in wild and demonstrative grief, at their parting ; a grief too deep and genuine for even the prospective pleasure of his journey to have had power, for the moment, to diminish. The handsome, petted youth, over whose tell-tale face had swept every phase of emotion, with his changeful humours and ceaseless whims, had left her for ever ; and the imposing, dignified, reserved nobleman, who rather permitted than responded to her embrace, appeared to her for the first few bewildering moments, as a stranger hitherto unknown ; but as the hours and days sped onwards, and familiarity once more asserted its presence, any momentary pain or disappointment she may have been conscious of, at the first meeting with her son, became merged into a fresh admiration and delight at the noble and self-possessed bearing of the young head of her household.

Two weeks had passed away since Phaco had returned to his lordly home, when one morning he entered his mother's presence as she sat surrounded by her maidens at their handiwork.

"My mother," he exclaimed, glancing, in spite of all his reserve of manner, somewhat impatiently towards the damsels, "I would desire speech of thee alone, if it may pleasure thee."

At a quick, imperious signal from their lady, the girls quietly vanished, work in hand, and mother and son were left alone.

“What matter is this, my son?” asked the mother, in the usual air of tender solicitude with which she always welcomed his presence.

For a few moments, however, Phaco paced the room in silence, until he paused, abruptly, before her.

“My mother,” he said, “wherefore did not thy kindness acquaint me with all the news of our fair, though somewhat humble, town of Poitiers?”

“Nay, my son,” answered the mother, smiling; “methinks I told thee all there chanced here during thy absence from thy mother’s heart. Did not I inform thee how that our neighbour, the Lord Hilary, hath been appointed bishop, by the voice of all the Christians? Did I not tell thee how the aged Francarius hath died, and how the youth Martin hath been baptized in the church of S. John, and hath now returned to his paternal home at Tours? Did I not also acquaint thee how successfully our neighbour, the good bishop, at this late Council at Milan, pleaded for the retaining of the excellent creed passed at Nicæa, and how he hath been chosen as their leader by nearly all the other Churches of our nation?”

“Yes, my mother, thou didst send me such tidings, yet didst thou not acquaint me with the great beauty that doth adorn the youthful lady Abra.”

The mother’s cheek slightly flushed. “And where hast thou chanced to meet with this fair maiden, my son,” she said, after a brief pause, “since the family

of our neighbour came not to the festivities with which we welcomed thee home again in the joy of our heart?"

"Balbus petitioned me to view the timber, which he opineth ought to be cut down, and as we approached the estate of our neighbour, the Bishop Hilary, we chanced upon a youthful maiden reclining beneath a tree, somewhat removed from her attendants. Our approach discomposed her, and she would fain have fled, only that I made myself known to her, when she retained not her fear longer; but had she not informed me that she was Abra, the daughter of Hilary, I should not have recalled her as such. My mother, believe me, I have not seen so fair a face, so exquisite a shape, nor heard so sweet a voice in all my travels. Well may she be called 'the pearl of Poitiers.' In all the lustre of Cæsar's Court there doth not shine so fair a gem."

Again the lady was silent, while something like a tear glistened in her eye, but Phaco was too intensely absorbed to observe it. When she spoke her voice was cold and constrained.

"Even if it be so, my son, what is the beauty of any bishop's daughter to the favourite of the lady Constantia?"

For all his newly-acquired reserve and self-command, the young nobleman started, while a hot flush rose to his cheek, but his voice was calm and unmoved.

"Knowest thou not, my mother, that the lady Constantia almost approacheth thee in years, and wholly lacketh thy grace and beauty?"

"And what recketh it, my son, if thus it be; is she not of the imperial blood of Cæsar? O my son, consider what might not such a union secure for thee."

"Naught that I would not barter a thousand-fold for one glance from the dark, pure eyes of Abra of Poictiers."

The lady groaned aloud. All her fondest hopes, her dream of lofty ambition for her darling, were crumbling to the ground, for the gossip of the Court had not failed to reach the distant ears of Claudiola concerning the growing favour with which Constantia had regarded her son; and bright and glorious were the visions that had risen up before the fond mother's eyes, all united in one crowning glory—an alliance with the Cæsars.

So bitter, therefore, was the disappointment caused by such an avowal of his passionate admiration for the comparatively obscure Abra, that more than one tear fell upon her hands, folded in their tightened, nervous clasp.

Phaco, however, unmoved by her evident distress, continued in the same calm low tones in which he had hitherto spoken. "My mother, dream not of this princely union for thy son; I swear by the gods (if such exist), that I will wed none other than this fair maid, the daughter of the noble Hilary."

A sudden hope, which she strove in vain to hide, sprang to the mother's heart and animated features and voice alike, as, dashing away her tears, she exclaimed—

"My son, accept thy mother's words ; I know this same bishop better than dost thou. He will never consent to his only child becoming the wife of a follower of the Arian Churches."

"I know it, my mother," was the quiet answer, but——"

"But what, my son ?"

Phaco, without regarding the face raised so anxiously to his, again continued to pace the room in silence. At length he seated himself by her side, and taking one of her hands in his raised it to his lips.

"My mother," he said, "tell me, hast thou ever denied thy son any petition it hath been in thy power to grant ?"

"If my memory serves me right, my son, never."

"Then I beseech thee, my mother, depart not from so wholesome a custom by refusing thy consent to that which now lieth nearest to my heart."

"But, my son, should I pleasure thee in this matter, what shall it avail, when the father of the maiden will most surely deny thee thy request ?"

"Ay, if he be ever solicited for the same."

"My son, how can such be avoided ?"

"Mother," said the young man, sinking his voice

almost to a whisper, "did I not acquaint thee with the fact that Saturninus, in whose illustrious company it was my good fortune to travel from Rome, hath evidenced some regard for thine unworthy son?"

"Ay, thou didst so inform me."

"But I have yet to show thee, my mother, that the same Bishop of Arles hateth this Bishop of Poitiers."

"And wherefore, my Phaco?"

"No doubt for the success that attended Hilary at the Council of Milan. So strong was the feeling he aroused, that even Saturninus and his two powerful friends, Valens and Urstatius, were compelled at the first assembly of clergy to vote for the recall of Athanasius, and although they eventually voted for his condemnation, which the Arian party gained, yet Hilary retired from the said Council crowned with too many honours for the maintaining of any goodwill towards him from the opposite side. The condemnation of this same Bishop of Alexandria did not content them in the place of the triumph of the ancient Nicene Creed of which thou hast spoken, and also of the choice of the Gaulois Churches which appointed Hilary to be their leader. But this approaching Council of Biterra¹ will right matters between them, if the prophecies of all men are to be regarded."

¹ Biterra—Bezières of the present day.

“How meanest thou, Phaco?”

“There will be a triumvirate at Biterra, before which will none have power to stand. Saturninus, Urstatius, and Valens, supported by the power of the great Augustus, will work their will with a few obscure bishops, and the leader they have chosen will be banished!”

“O my son, say not so; surely the good, the gentle, the godly Hilary will not be thus torn from his helpless wife and child and cast into a distant, dreary exile; surely none, calling themselves Christians, could command such unkindness.”

“Mark me, my mother. Both Hilary and his friend Rhodanus, the Bishop of Toulouse, will be banished from their sees. But why these tears? surely thou, a worshipper of the gods, hast but a small interest in these unending quarrels of the Churches of the Christians; what is the Bishop Hilary or his fate to thee?”

“Much, Phaco. He hath proved himself a kindly protector to the lonely widow during the absence of her son, and the gentle lady Rhoda has ever been attentive to my solitude; moreover, thy mother has profited much by the exhortations of the holy bishop, insomuch that I only awaited thy return, my son, to confess the Christian faith in the waters of baptism. I know but little of the errors of the Arians; the one fact that the noble lady Constantia is a Christian left naught for thy mother to desire in thy union with

the most illustrious of them all. The good bishop Hilary both writeth and preacheth against them oft-times, but my poor mind is too little exercised in the doctrines of the Christian faith to be able to comprehend where some err ; all I know, my son, is, that my whole heart hath been crying out for such a friend as Hilary preaches—the Jesus Christ of the Christians, who is a man to sympathise, and God to save. Oh! may He grant that I shall not lose the one who hath led me into so great a truth, and yet—wherefore should I weep for myself at the thought of such a grief, when it may be that the gentle Rhoda shall be worse than widowed, and the youthful Abra worse than fatherless.”

“ Ay, my mother, thou sayest the truth ; should Hilary be banished, they will need a protector, and who so fit and natural a one as their nearest neighbour ? My mother, thinkest thou not but that when the lady Rhoda is thus so painfully deserted she will gladly accept of a son for herself, and of a husband for her lovely daughter, in her husband’s early friend—Phaco.” The young man spoke lightly, and something in his manner jarred on his mother’s already wounded spirit, as he continued : “ And now I crave pardon, my mother, for again asking leave to absent myself once more, for a brief period, from thy gentle presence ; but I would fain visit my noble friend Saturninus before he departeth for Biterra.”

“ Phaco ! and so soon after thy return ! Think

how lonely thy mother hath been during thy absence through all these years."

"I will soon return, my mother ; there is important reason why I should visit Saturninus now. Men say he is an excellent hunter, and always woundeth to the death ; moreover, he hath a noble quarry for his chase, and I would fain join him in such handsome sport." And with the accustomed reverence, but accompanied with a smile, which, on any other face than that of her idolised son, the lady might have deemed to have been of a somewhat sinister expression, he departed from her presence.

CHAPTER V

"God heareth and answereth us because of our need, not at the intercession of angels, sent only to minister to the heirs of salvation and to bear their prayers into His presence." ¹

"God heareth (not at their intercession but) because of our needs—we are helpless and we need Him, and so He answereth us."

Hilary spoke with his hand resting on his wife's shoulder; the imperial summons to him to attend the approaching Council at Biterra, in Languedoc, had at last arrived, and both he and Rhoda were too fully aware of the power and quality of their enemies not to fear that the result might be a prolonged, if not a lifelong, separation. In the first moments of her grief, the brave spirit of Rhoda had seemed to quail before such an ordeal, but gradually grace triumphed over nature in the Christian's heart. And the face she raised to her husband's was radiant with a triumphant faith that shone through her tears like God's rainbow on a cloud; but the bishop, wholly absorbed in the glory of his theme, heeded her not, and with his rapt

¹ St. Hil., *Pict. Epis., Opera*, Dom Coustant, 592.

gaze turned upward, he continued, "For there is but one Mediator between God and man.¹ He Who is God and man, born from God by Whom all things were created, in Whom all things consist, He is the one and only Mediator between God and man, and there is none other, and remember, my Rhoda," he continued, turning towards her with a smile of inexpressible sweetness, "that the heart is the place of prayer."²

For long after her husband had left her, Rhoda stood on the same spot in deep, painful thought.

Through her casement the vineyards and orange groves appeared in the exquisite beauty of their early summer foliage, but, unconscious of all earthly beauty, the still young wife was gazing into the separation and blankness that awaited her in the near future. Yet through all the agony that the prospect brought to her loving heart the faithful words she had just listened to carried an indescribable sense of comfort, and as at length her knees and head bent low in prayer, there rose from her quivering lips the Master's utterance which had been echoed by her husband's lips that morning—

"Not my will, O Lord, but Thine be done."

She rose quickly at the sound of a light approaching footstep, and, hastily drying her eyes, greeted the entrance of her child with her usual serenity.

¹ St. Hil., *Pict. Epis.*, *Opera*, Dom Coustant, 454.

² *Ibid.* 535.

Never perhaps until that moment, when her heart was overwhelmed with the foreboding of sorrow and loneliness, had the extreme beauty of the maiden struck the mother's eye and heart so powerfully, and we might perhaps add, so painfully. Abra was arrayed in a robe of dazzling whiteness, bordered with purple, the distinctive dress of virgins of noble birth, her lustrous hair, unadorned as her mother's, hung round her like a veil, her large dark eyes were shining with some unusual excitement, her pearly teeth gleamed through the exquisite curve of the slightly parted lips, and her cheeks were tinged with a soft, rosy flush. For a moment the mother gazed in silent admiration at the picture before her, radiant with youth and health, and of such rare loveliness, that sixteen centuries have not been able to obliterate the record of its gentle lustre.¹

But the wise Rhoda quickly recovered herself, and before her daughter had time to marvel at the unusual expression on her mother's face, it had disappeared.

"From whence comest thou, my Abra, and wherefore these bright cheeks?" she said with a gentle caress, "and this eager manner? What hath chanced to thee, during thy brief absence from thy mother?"

"Oh, my mother, I have seen and conversed with our neighbour Phaco."

"Where, my Abra?"

¹ See Appendix, 8.

"I was sitting by the river side, reading my father's most excellent discourse on prayer, when, suddenly, I heard men's voices, and before I had time to rise and to flee to Alva, who was near by, Phaco and his retainer Balbus came towards me. But, mother, he has grown so tall and stately I should never have known him, had he not named himself to me."

"Which of the two, my daughter—Phaco or Balbus?"

"Nay, mother, smile not thus; it is Phaco alone of whom I speak. He looks good and noble, and his voice is low and pleasant; he addressed me, thy little Abra, mother, as though I were one of those grand ladies he had met on his travels. Perchance my father would have adjudged his conversation to have been but foolish; it seemed not so to me, my mother, and he informed me that it is his purpose to pay his respects to my father and to thee."

"I fear that will be impossible, my child. Nay, look not so sad, my Abra; if all reports be true, our neighbour Phaco hath joined himself to the Arian Churches, and thy father, who ever seeketh to follow the words of Holy Scripture in all things, would fain be obedient to the holy bishop Saint John, in that he commandeth, 'Receive not such a one into thy house, neither bid him "God-speed," lest he that bid-deth him God-speed be partaker of his evil deeds.'"

"My mother," answered the girl quietly, while the colour forsook her cheeks, "I do not like these cruel

reports. I do not believe that Phaco is a follower of those wicked Arian Churches ; but oh, mother, why dost thou regard me thus, and why these tears ? Oh, tell thy Abra what hath chanced." The girl had sprung to her feet, and was confronting her mother with white and quivering lips.

"Thou shalt know all, my Abra," she answered, drawing her into her arms, "for the time hath come to acquaint thee with what I fear will sadden thy young heart to hear.

"Thou knowest that the Arian bishops have Cæsar's support and willing ear, and already have they persuaded him to banish many godly pastors of our holy faith ; even the grey hairs of the most revered Hosius of Corduba have not saved him from a like fate ; Liberius of Rome is at this present moment a dweller in the desolate region of Thrace, and Maximus, the noble Bishop of Naples—but why dwell upon the pain of his martyrdom, he hath departed to the sweet Home beyond the reach of his tormentors, and *now* he is comforted. But, my Abra, thinkest thou that while so many godly bishops are driven forth into exile, that thy father will be spared ; nay, nay, my child, at this approaching Council at Biterra, to which thy father hath to-day been summoned, many of the faithful bishops of the Gaulois Churches will doubtless be sentenced to years of exile, thy father and his beloved Rhodanus among them."

A sharp cry broke from the girl's lips : " Oh, my father ! my father ! I cannot give thee up."

" Not," answered the bishop, who at that moment re-entered the apartment—" not at the command of the blessed Lord? oh, fie, my Abra ! Thy father must indeed have been a faithless pastor an he hath taught thee no better than to resist what His most blessed will ordaineth, even should that be to walk in the midst of trouble, for as the apostle saith, ' Tribulation worketh patience,' for he knew if there were no fighting there would be no victory, that faith untried would languish ;¹ and he knew therefore how to glory in tribulation. Hence also the Psalmist's inspired cry of faith and hope : ' O Lord, Thy mercy is for ever, forsake not the work of Thine hands.' And the mercy of God is for ever, my child ; His hand extends beyond the anger of our enemies, and protects His faithful servant, who can say : ' Thy Hands have made me and fashioned me,' and whose only trust is in Him and through Him, Who has said : ' Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the ages, even our Lord Jesus Christ who is God blessed for ever.'"

Her father's words of high and holy trust gradually soothed the girl's sobs, while Rhoda's hand stole softly into her husband's, and in the place of their quickly-checked tears her eyes shone with a heavenly enthusiasm.

¹ St. Hil., *Pict. Epis., Opera*, Dom Coustant, 137.

"And now, my little daughter," said the good bishop, after a short, impressive silence, while his eyes rested tenderly upon the young face lying on his shoulder, white and still in its pathetic beauty, "wilt thou receive the instructions thy father would lay upon thee, and which he would fain have thee observe during his absence?"

"Speak, my father; thy daughter hears."

"With thy mother's consent, I have petitioned my worthy friend Martin to watch over thy mother and thee until God, in His good pleasure, shall restore His unworthy servant to his beloved family and flock again.¹ Thy mother will accept him as a brother, and will be guided by his counsel. Although I command thee in all things to obey thy mother, yet do I beseech thee to render to Martin that reverence due to one who possesseth much piety and ever remaineth thy father's dearest friend. With such a God to bless thee, with such a mother to guide thee, and with such a friend to protect thee, I can leave thee, my child, my precious treasure, with no fear but for thy sorrow. And now, my wife and daughter, inasmuch as the place of prayer is the heart, let us seek His face together whose promise we have just listened to, 'I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world''"; and, kneeling there side by side, in the hush of the Divine presence, we reverently leave them.

Hilary's request met with so ready and joyful an

¹ See Appendix, 9.

acquiescence that, with his father's hearty consent, Martin at once started from his humble dwelling for Hilary's beautiful mansion, anxious to spend as long a period as possible with his revered master. So great was his desire to lose no time in reaching his destination that he accomplished the journey, a distance of sixty miles, in less than two days. The gratitude and delight with which Hilary and Rhoda welcomed him was more than a compensation for a rapid, wearisome journey, over bad roads, and for the dangers to which he had been exposed, both from wild beasts and banditti, which infested the forest byways. But even had the bishop's and his lady's reception of the tired traveller been less warm, the affectionate, graceful greeting of Abra would have repaid him (as, notwithstanding his fast-developing asceticism, he acknowledged to himself) for a journey involving three times the amount of fatigue and risk.

"My Hilary," he said, as, arm linked in arm, the two friends paced the courtyard together the day after Martin's arrival, in deep and earnest conversation, "thou art placing upon thine unworthy disciple no small responsibility in entrusting to his protection and guardianship so sweet and attractive a maiden as thy beautiful Abra. I fear me there lacketh not many who would fain share mine office, or even, perchance, undertake the charge of it altogether."

For an instant a slightly puzzled expression passed

over the serene and gentle countenance of the Bishop of Poitiers.

"Indulge no such fear, my honest Martin, the damsel is but a child and hath no thought of suitors; and," he continued in a low impressive voice, while a flush of deep feeling mounted to his cheek, "thou knowest, Martin, the one yearning desire of my heart for my precious child."

"Ay, I know it well, and approve of it as equally, my friend, but thou must pardon thy Martin for reminding thee that there are those who know it not, and even did they know it, they would not regard it. Moreover, the report of thy daughter's exceeding beauty and grace hath extended farther than, perchance, thou knowest; already men call her the 'pearl of Poitiers,' and I warn thee, my Hilary, there are those who would fain rob me of the custody of so fair a jewel."

"I commend her to the Divine protection, and there is a voice within my breast that tells me He will give me, in this matter, the desire of my heart. And now, my Martin, I would fain turn to other matters, and beg for thine attention, while I unfold to thee the subject that I desire to bring before my people on this approaching Sabbath."

"It will greatly pleasure me to hear the same."

"I desire, then, in the first place, to show that all the works of men are vain¹ and also corrupt, for

¹ St. Hil., *Pict. Epis.*, *Opera*, Dom Coustant, 358.

they are but the overflowings of the flesh,¹ and I will further show that no man can be just before God; even Mary, chosen of God,² will have to come into the severity of the judgment that is to come."

"Alas, my revered master," exclaimed the other, in a tone so mournful as to be almost hopeless, "then how shall we fare?"

Hilary turned towards his pupil with a glow upon his face that seemed to irradiate his delicate, thought-worn features, until they shone as with the light of an inspired oracle, as laying one hand upon his shoulder and raising the other towards heaven, he repeated in hushed and reverent tones the substance of those sublime words (which had dawned with all their unutterable splendour of Divine revelation upon the lonely prophet, a thousand years before): "Faith justifieth and faith only."³

Little reckoned that saintly speaker, as with simple, childlike lips he uttered that majestic truth enfolded in the Word, that to his trusting heart was ever the voice of God Himself, that the time would come when, rending asunder the corrupt mass of human teaching, which through centuries a degenerate Church should heap upon that declaration of Jehovah's remedy for a sin-stained, ruined race, there would again leap upward, not with the upheaval of a volcano's flame, but with the power

¹ St. Hil., *Pict. Epis.*, *Opera*, Dom Coustant, 306.

² *Ibid.* 422.

³ *Ibid.* 519. See Appendix, 10.

of a resurrection glory, until a startled world should re-echo to the trumpet blast of the Watchword of the Reformation, "The just shall live by His faith."¹

It was upon the following day that Hilary and Phaco met for the first time after many years' separation. The bishop had repaired to the mansion of the latter, inspired with the prayerful desire of winning his early friend to the true faith in the Saviour he had already confessed outwardly in the waters of baptism; but before he had found an opportunity of acquainting the young nobleman with the real purport of his visit, Phaco informed him that it was his intention of paying his respects to himself and Rhoda on the morrow.

"It will indeed afford me great pleasure to renew our friendship, my beloved Hilary," he said.

The bishop paused for a moment and his cheek somewhat paled, but he answered steadily, "It will indeed give me unspeakable delight to welcome thee into my home and family when thou shalt have been led by God's grace to exchange the blasphemous teaching of the Arian heretics, but until then——"

"Until then, what?"

"I have the commands of my beloved Master not to receive thee inside my house, and I dare not disobey them, even were my refusal to endanger the loss of thy inestimable friendship."²

¹ St. Hil., *Pict. Epis., Opera*, Dom Coustant, 548-607.

² See Appendix, II.

With a quiet bow, Phaco appeared to dismiss the subject, and immediately turned to other matters of mutual interest ; but, although to the proud spirit of the young patrician the bishop, by his rejection of his polite offer, had conveyed an insult never to be forgiven, yet outwardly, through the remainder of the visit, he still wore the polished mask he had learned so well to adjust, and this so entirely disguised his real feelings that Hilary left him unconscious of their existence. And yet, all the while, inwardly the flames of resentment and passion burned in their quenchless fury ; and when the following day the young nobleman departed, followed by a brilliant retinue, to pay his visit to Saturninus, among all the hosts of his Arian foes, the unsuspecting, guileless Bishop of Poitiers did not possess a more deadly or bitter enemy than in his early friend and neighbour, Phaco Varinella.

CHAPTER VI

It had been with a profound grief that the elder Martin had received Hilary's letter apprising him of the approaching Council, and of his forebodings concerning his own fate in connection with it. The affectionate esteem which the citizen of Tours had always entertained for the man who had been the instrument of his own and his son's conversion to Christianity, led him promptly to offer to accompany Hilary to Biterra. The only difficulty in the way was how to dispose of his daughter Concissa (a lively and amiable maiden, twelve months older than Abra) during his absence. This perplexity, however, was speedily allayed by the offer of an asylum for the youthful Concissa in the household of Rhoda, under the guardianship and protection of her brother, tendered with gratitude and delight both by the bishop and his wife. The latter's loving heart was greatly cheered, in the midst of her grief at the approaching departure of her husband, by this delicate mark of their old friend's devotion, and by the thought of all that his clear judgment and tender thoughtfulness would mean to Hilary; while the bishop, who read in every event of his life the will

of his heavenly Father concerning him, saw in this offer of his highly esteemed friend only another tender touch of the hand of Divine love. But it was not gratitude alone which prompted this offer of a home for Concissa during her father's absence. Both parents dreaded the shock of this approaching separation from her all but idolised father on the delicate frame of their beloved child, and in thus providing her with the novelty of a companion so nearly of her own age, they fondly hoped that the young girl's thoughts might partially at least be diverted into other channels; and so the offer to receive the motherless maiden into their house was as candidly made on the one hand, as it was thankfully accepted on the other. And thus it came to pass that one lovely evening in early spring, when nature seemed to be bursting into all the boundless beauty of bird and blossom, scent and sunshine, clad in her simple dress, clinging in nervous terror to her father's arm, the shy and timid Concissa (unconscious of the glorious destiny awaiting her in becoming the mother of one of the noblest and grandest of God's missionary saints) crossed the threshold of Hilary's lordly home. Notwithstanding, however, the shyness which overwhelmed the Gaulois maiden as she found herself in the midst of such unusual surroundings as the high-bred elegance and luxury of a nobleman's mansion offered, the reception awaiting her from each member of the

family, even including the upper servants, gradually dispersed her fears, and she was at last able timidly to respond to Abra's affectionate embraces.

"My Concissa is not used to such state and grandeur as thy fair home supplieth, my Hilary," said the elder Martin with a hearty laugh, as he responded in his turn to the warm greeting of his friends; "but," he continued, as the two maidens retired under the charge of Alva, "it will help to prepare the maid for the estate and rank to which she will be presently called."¹

"How meanest thou, my friend?" said Rhoda. "Surely a maiden of such tender years doth not dream of betrothal, nor dost thou on her behalf?"

"Ay, so I said," answered her guest, somewhat ruefully, "but neither the noble Potitus nor his son Colfurnius would listen to me, and so they have e'en won from me my treasure; not," continued the father with a serious air, "that the maiden is herself loath that thus it should be, and I marvel not at her choice, for Colfurnius is a noble and godly youth, and lacketh not that outward seeming which is pleasing to a maiden's eye and fancy."

"Speakest thou of Colfurnius of Benoni,² who hath been recently ordained deacon of the Church there? If so, thou hast indeed secured a worthy husband for thy gentle daughter," remarked Hilary.

"The same, my friend," was Martin's answer.

¹ See Appendix, 12.

² See Appendix, 13.

"His father, the noble Potitus, is presbyter, as thou wottest, of the same church; and the departed Odesse, the father of the said Potitus, held the office of deacon to the Christians of Benoni before either of them,—as far back, in fact, as the days when that inhuman tyrant, Diocletian, persecuted the saints of the Most High. . . .

"My boy," he continued, turning towards his son, who was listening in thoughtful and somewhat perplexed silence to the conversation, "hath not yet had an opportunity of congratulating his young sister, for the betrothal is of so recent a date that it hath been effected since his departure from our humble home; but it is my desire he should do so, for although it will be hard to part with the maid, yet doth this alliance with so noble and godly a husband seem to me to contain all that our affection can desire for her."

"Yet, as thou sayest, it will indeed be a trial to thy loving father's heart to give thy beloved child even to this clergyman, Colfurnius," said Rhoda gently.

"Ay, thou speakest the truth, most noble lady," her guest answered, with a slight tremor in his deep voice; "she is the last pledge of my beloved Julia, as my Martin was the first; and, thou mayest have heard, her birth into this world caused the departure of her mother"—and a deep-drawn sigh escaped from the speaker's lips—"into another, and pagan

though she was, I trust, through Christ's merits, into a better."

"And there were doubtless many children born between the birth of our beloved friend Martin and that of the youthful Concissa," said Rhoda, anxious to draw her guest's thoughts from the painful contemplation of the death of his heathen wife, "who, methinks I have heard, died young."

"Ay, and all of them unbaptized," was the grave low answer. "God grant that my only surviving children may spend the lives that have been vouchsafed to them to the glory of the blessed Jesus."

"My father," said Martin, coming forward, while a deep flush overspread his expressive countenance, "wilt thou pardon me if I ask thee, whether thou deemest that this thy most pious wish shall be attained by giving my sister in marriage to a holy deacon of the Church of Christ?"

"Most assuredly, my son! And wherefore not?"

"Because, were it not holier, my father, to abstain from all such carnal affections in one who hath entered upon so sacred an office as hath Colfurnius?"

"Tell me, my Martin," said his father, gravely regarding him, "by whom were these words writ, and where dost thou read them: 'Let the deacons be the husband of one wife'?"

"I find them in the Holy Scriptures," was the slow, somewhat hesitating answer, "and they were writ by the holy bishop, Paul, in his letter to Titus."

“Ay, and hath not God declared marriage is honourable in all, and hath not the holy estate of matrimony been held up, before the eyes of all men, in the same Holy Scriptures, as a picture of the ever-blessed union between Christ and His Church. Thy father, my Martin, leaves thee free to follow thine own choice in this same important matter, whether thou wilt seek a wife, or whether thou wilt abstain from so doing ; but beware, my son, that thou dost never seek to lay a yoke upon other men that is not of God’s giving. My advice, wert thou to seek it, would be, that as thou seekest to follow the example of our noble bishop, in whose presence we now converse, in all other things, so thou wouldest emulate it in this same matter of matrimony. I ask thee, our gentle hostess,” continued the elder Martin in a lighter tone, and turning to the lady with a momentary twinkle in his eye, “to second thy unworthy guest ; dost not thou, in conjunction with thy lord, consider marriage to be a most blessed estate, and,” he continued more gravely, “ordained of God ?”

Rhoda’s fond gaze sought her husband’s face, in response to her friend’s challenge, and rested there for a moment with such a look of intense and rapt devotion that she seemed unconscious of all other presence but his ; the next, the remembrance of their coming separation, fell with such a sudden blow upon her tender heart, that with a half-smothered sob, she hastened from the apartment, to hide a grief she was

as powerless to overcome as she was unwilling to exhibit.

Hilary speedily followed her, and father and son were left alone.

"Ah, my father," exclaimed the latter, the tears of sympathy sparkling in his dark eyes, "if marriage hath its joys, it hath its sorrows also, and well may the same blessed Paul, whom thou hast already quoted, exclaim, 'Such shall have trouble in the flesh.'"

"My son," answered the father, with a countenance equally grave, "I question not that our gentle hostess and her noble husband, even in this hour of their supreme grief, would tell thee, wert thou to ask them, that the sweetness and delight of their mutual affection doth weightily overbalance the sorrow of their approaching separation."

"Even so," answered Martin in a low voice, "yet would it fare better for the Church of Christ, in my judgment, were that separation to be final."

"Beware, my son," exclaimed the elder man, with flashing eye, "that thou settest not up that same judgment of thine against the utterance of the Almighty God, who hath declared, Whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder."

"True, my honoured father, but that which man may not do, might God Himself effect."

"Ay, and doth He not do so? Is thy father, Martin, the only bereaved husband who hath learnt

at the blessed feet of Christ to say : ' The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord ' ? Oh, my Martin, beware that thou foster not the error of so subtle a form that even those among the saintliest discern it not."

" To what error dost thou refer, my father ? "

" The error of placing man's appointment for God's dealings ; to yield a beloved wife, when it pleaseth the Lord to take her, with becoming submission and resignation, is the triumph of Christ ; to relinquish her, at man's bidding, is the devil's victory."

" Yet surely, my father, it is better for those who are honoured by so high a call as that of ministering to the flock, over whom the Lord hath made them overseers, to dispense with all such earthly claims as matrimony."

" So thought not the blessed Cyprian, my Martin, although he had been wedded, as thou wottest, but two years when he was chosen bishop by the Church of Carthage, yet did he continue in lawful and loving wedlock with his gentle spouse. And now, my Martin, hearken thou diligently to that which I enjoin upon thee with that parental authority which God hath entrusted to me : I charge thee that thou see to it, that thou dost not burden thy young sister's heart with aught of thy doubt concerning the lawfulness of her union with this same noble deacon Colfurnius. Had I not already been somewhat aware of thy sentiments concerning such matter, I should have been

unwilling for the binding of the betrothal to have been effected without consulting thy mind upon so important a subject ; but now I repeat what I have already commanded thee—take heed that thou utter not a word to the maiden that might cast a cloud over her innocent and natural delight in the prospect of this fair future that her young heart delighteth to contemplate.”

“I pass my word to thee, my father, that I will obey thee in this matter, even as thou desirest, yet may I confess to thee now, that it grieveth me that this noble deacon Colfurnius should wish to enter upon so earthly a state as that of matrimony, even with so godly a maiden as Concissa.”

“He does but follow the noble example of his father and grandfather before him, and of many others, of which time alone forbids me to recall to thy mind. My Martin,” continued the elder man, solemnly, in a voice trembling with deep emotion, “thy poor, foolish, and, alas, once pagan father, hath looked hopefully forward to a coming time when thy children and Concissa’s should, in the place of my own unbaptized babes, rise up to be mighty workers for our blessed Jesus, in a wicked and godless generation.”

“O my beloved father !” exclaimed the younger man, seizing his father’s hand with love and reverence, “may God answer the desires of thine heart in our beloved Concissa’s offspring ; for myself, I have

long ago yielded up my body, as well as my soul and spirit, to be wholly the Lord's, and I have the same blessed Scripture, which thou hast quoted, to assure me that herein I do better than he who contemplateth an earthly marriage."

"Even so, my son," was the elder man's answer. "And yet——"

"And yet what, my father?"

"It seems to me, my Martin, that thou speakest as might a blind man discourse on the colour of the flowers, or one who is deaf on music. Had thy heart ever gone out in love to some godly maiden, then, perchance, thy resolve might have been somewhat of a less unearthly nature."

As his father spoke a rich, deep wave of colour overspread Martin's pale face, only to recede as swiftly, leaving it almost livid in its deadly whiteness, till his very lips grew ashen.

"My son," exclaimed the elder man anxiously, "thou art not in health; this sorrow of thy friends is too much for thine affectionate heart; forgive thy father if he has said aught to grieve thee."

"Reassure thyself, my honoured father," answered the young man, as with a strong effort he sought to recover his self-command, and to steady his voice; "a little matter of faintness, to which I have become subject of late, has overcome me. I will, with thy permission, seek the outer air to revive me."

But even as he spoke the curtain over the doorway

was raised by an attendant, and Abra, accompanied by her young guest, Concissa, entered the apartment.

It would have been impossible to imagine a fairer picture than that formed by the two girls as they stood there arm in arm (a result of their already swiftly formed friendship). Abra's tall, graceful form was enhanced by the plump, dainty little figure beside her, as was her dark patrician beauty by the fairer skin and somewhat irregular features of her companion ; while, on the other hand, the rosy cheeks and laughing eyes of the Gaulois maiden lost none of their charms from their contrast with the pensive, serious expression which rested on the lovely countenance of the nobleman's daughter.

Concissa had evidently lost all her fears in the companionship of Abra. She would have bounded to her father's side in her usual demonstrativeness, had it not been for the presence of her brother, of whom she always stood somewhat in awe ; he, however, greeted her entrance with an affectionate smile ; and with a low, formal bow to Abra, but without glancing in her direction, hurriedly left the apartment.

"Well-a-day," mused the elder Martin that night, ere he sank to rest in the luxurious couch prepared for him by the order of his grateful hostess, "surely, as sings the poet Horace, 'strongest oak and threefold brass' must entwine my poor lad's heart, an he can thus coldly entreat so fair and sweet a maid as is this lovely Abra. The lad is naught but a born celibate."

CHAPTER VII

“WHITHER so fast, Balbus?”

The speaker was a man of about thirty summers. His figure was small, but well-built, and attired in a peasant's dress, which consisted of a blue blouse and knee breeches, the latter tight fitting; a scarf, secured on the shoulders by a bright buckle, not unlike the Scotch plaid of the present day, and shoes, or high sandals, provided with thick wooden soles. His complexion was fair, his features regular, his expression animated, while the occasional twinkle in his bright blue eyes denoted a sense of humour and a promise of *bon compagnon*-ship.

No two persons could have presented a greater contrast than did the jolly peasant to the pompous-looking individual he thus ventured familiarly to address. Balbus, the Lady Claudiola's steward, was a man of huge proportions, habited in the dress that bespoke a freedman of high position in a noble Roman family. His frame was bulky, and possessed a certain dignity, enhanced by the blue toga that floated behind him in the summer breeze as he strode onward; his skin was swarthy, and his coarse features were characterised by a mixture of cunning and self-

complacency, and were only redeemed from positive repulsiveness by the strong, clean-cut lower jaw, and by lines, which might have denoted firmness and fidelity, around the otherwise sensual lips.

He paused and slightly turned on hearing his name.

"Whither am I going?" he replied, in a harsh, grating voice, assuming a still more bombastic demeanour, and glancing disdainfully at his interrogator. "I marvel, first, that thou shouldst ask such a question; secondly, that thou goest not on the same errand; it is not every day that these prating Christians, with their pestilent bishop at their head, have the honour of receiving such as the noble Lady Claudiola by their accursed rite of baptism; but my time is too valuable to waste it upon thy peasant dulness, Franco, I must e'en onward to attend my noble mistress. Ah! the Manes of our house! how will they support such a degradation? Fare thee well, poor peasant."

"Nay, my Balbus, thy humble friend, Franco, will e'en bear thee company; truth to tell, I only awaited thy presence to join yonder throng pressing so eagerly forward."

"Bestow thy company upon those who bespeak it; for myself, I prefer that of my equals!"

"Nay, my worthy Balbus, my affection for thee is such that not only do I favour thee with more than thou askest, but I will so work in thine interest that,

before nightfall, thy noble mistress shall be made fully acquainted with thy solicitude on her behalf—nay, thy exact words, my Balbus, concerning these same prating Christians and their pestilent bishop, with their accursed rite of baptism, thy very words, mine honoured friend, in which thou hast expressed this same solicitude, shall be brought to her ears before this fair May day has sunk into night.”

The steward turned fiercely upon his unwelcome companion, his dark countenance almost purple with rage.

“Thou miserable Gaul!” he exclaimed, his voice trembling with passion. “Thinkest thou the noble Lady Claudiola would endure such carrion as thou in her presence, or listen to the utterance of thine untutored lips, were they charged with a message from the gods?”

“Nay, my Balbus, for well am I aware that a free-born peasant hath not learnt to bridle his tongue, or trammel his spirit, as hath one born in slavery; but the uncaged lark may soar where the fetters of the golden eagle permit him not to follow. Know, my Balbus, that thy humble Franco possesses the power to communicate thy actual words into the ears of Claudiola in a whisper, as soft as the summer wind now fluttering the folds of thy toga.”

“Clown! what meanest thou?”

“Knowest thou not, my friend, the power of a woman’s tongue?”

Balbus started. If report were true, the blustering major-domo himself smarted under the despotism of a shrewish wife whose speech was not always honeyed.

"Ah!" muttered the peasant, drawing nearer to his companion, and casting his eyes downward to hide their twinkle, "canst thou not, at this moment, recall many instances of the persuasive force of thy gentle Luculla's tongue. Hath she not even compelled thee——"

"Fool! proceed with thy meaning or thou wilt tempt me to wring thy miserable gullet, as I would yonder strutting gander's!"

"Well, then, my beloved Balbus," continued his companion, in the same friendly tone of voice, and in seeming unconsciousness drawing out a short dagger (a weapon used for slaying oxen) from the folds of his plaid and fingering the edge lightly as he spoke, "I, too, as a married man, have discovered that the logic of a woman's mind is as wonderful as her speech; urge them to do one thing, and in the excess of their docility they are sure to do the opposite. Therefore, when my Franca shall come forth to meet her lord upon his return, I have only to say: 'My Franca, repeat not to thy fair friend, the nurse of the Lady Abra, these utterances I now acquaint thee with, that my most esteemed friend Balbus hath confided to me concerning the Christians into whose community his mistress hath to-day entered,' and I wager thee, my friend, that no sooner

do I depart to feed my bullocks, than my Franca will off to Alva, and will inform her of all thou hast spoken, who in her turn will inform her gossip, the fair Julia, thy mistress's waiting-woman, who, having received a like injunction not to breathe the same to her mistress, will straightway acquaint her, not only with thy actual words, but with certain additions, which her ready wit and the great favour the fair Julia hath to thee, may incite her to invent."

The unfortunate steward, between whom and Claudiola's chamber-woman there existed a bitter feud of long standing, actually shook between rage and fear, and his cheek paled beneath his dusky skin; but, as if totally unobservant of the effect of his words, the peasant continued—

"So thou seest, my Balbus, I have the power to serve thee, and it shall not be the fault of thy faithful Franco if thy noble mistress——"

"Hold, my worthy, my most esteemed Franco," almost gasped the steward, with great difficulty overcoming some internal impulse, which, to judge from the convulsive clutching of his flabby fingers, did not appear to be of an amiable intention towards his companion.

"Hold, my beloved Franco, I have but been acting a part. My esteem for these noble Christians is only second to my affection to thee. I did but speak to urge thee on, that I might enjoy the flashes of thy merry humour. Not a word to thy fair Franca, the

flower of her sex. I will bind thee to secrecy, an thou wilt, in a goblet of the most luscious wine my master's vineyards have as yet produced. Tell me, in what can thy devoted Balbus favour thee, an I pledge my word to do it, so that thou repeat not mine idle words to thy fair and virtuous spouse?"

As the steward spoke a change came over the peasant's face. The twinkle died out of his bright blue eyes, and, drawing himself up to his full height, with a dignity of manner as unexpected as it was complete, he suddenly confronted his companion, and laying both his hands on the freedman's huge shoulders, he said in slow and solemn accents—

"I accept thy conditions, Balbus, I bind myself to silence, an thou givest me a true answer to one question."

"Question as thou wilt, my worthy Franco," answered the steward, an expression of relief stealing over his features.

"And thou wilt answer?"

"Most assuredly, my worthy friend."

"Where is thy master, the Lord Phaco?"

Had a thunderbolt fallen suddenly at his feet, the steward's consternation could hardly have appeared greater, his very lips grew white as the blood receded from his face, only to return in a flood that coloured the very roots of his hair.

"What is that to thee, thou miserable caitiff?" he thundered, hurling the slight form of the peasant

from him with such force that he would have fallen had he not staggered against the arm of a tree.

The dauntless Franco, however, quickly recovered his equilibrium, and rubbing his grazed shoulder with one hand, while with the other he still grasped his poignard, he replied in tones as unmoved as before—

“Much, Balbus, and unless thou redeemest thy promise by giving me the information I seek, I will work thy ruin, not only with thy noble mistress, but with the Proconsul of the great Augustus.”

“My ruin ! thou miserable boar !”

The peasant drew nearer, and although he sunk his voice to a whisper, every utterance fell sharp and clear upon the summer air.

“Where is the silver, Balbus, that yon merchants from Tours gave thee for the spoil of half thy master’s vineyards ? Who mixed poison in the food of the Circassian boy-slave because he was rising in his lady’s favour ?—and whose hands gagged and whipped the old Nubian to death because he had discovered the crime ? Who—— ?”

“Stay—man—demon—god—whatever thou art !” cried the steward, his teeth chattering, and his face livid with terror, and spreading out his hands as if to ward off some terrible vision.

“I will not stay,” answered the peasant, “but I will carry the proofs of thy villainy—as clear as shines the sun above us—to the Proconsul, unless

thou dost tell me, and that instantly, where is thy Lord Phaco ? ”

There was a moment's silence ; the steward covered his face with his hands, the quivering of his huge frame alone testifying to the powerful internal emotion through which he was passing, while the peasant, with folded arms, as calmly surveyed him, as might a hunter some huge boar of the chase hopelessly entangled in his net.

“ Well,” the latter said at length, “ thou most upright of major-domos, thou prince of stewards, wilt thou answer me or shall I to—— ? ”

The wretched man uncovered his face, and as he did so the huge drops of perspiration, the result of his inward conflict, glistened on his dark forehead.

“ Franco,” he said, in a low, husky voice, “ whether the holy gods have revealed to thine inner consciousness that which no other breathing human being knoweth, I wot not, but of one crime is my soul as innocent as is thine own. I will not betray my master.”

“ As thou willest, my most virtuous Balbus ; but know this, that not even thy fidelity to thy lord's person will save thee from the penalty of thy crimes ; refuse the information I seek, and twenty-four hours hence, thy mutilated carcass will be cast forth as food for the vilest carrion. Yet mark me, poor wretch, in seeking to know the abode of thy lord I swear by the holy gods that no evil or harm is intended against

thy master. Let the proud hawk soar where he will, while there remains a pulse to beat or an arm to stir among the men of Pictavium, he shall not defile, even with his passing shadow, the white pinions of the spotless dove that nestles in their hearts. I give thee one more chance, Balbus. Is it thine intention to give or to withhold the information I seek?"

"My Franco," answered the wretched steward, "since I have thine honest word that no harm is intended against my master, I will not do him the wrong of running the unspeakable risk of robbing him for ever of the inestimable services of his faithful Balbus, and I tell thee frankly that at this moment, even while we have been pursuing our friendly and pleasant discourse, my Lord Phaco is journeying with Saturninus and all his suite to Biterra; it is my august lord's pleasure to be present at the approaching Council."

The peasant started, and for the first time his honest countenance grew dark and troubled.

"Biterra! now may the gods, whom he hath forsworn, defend our noble Hilary and his house. I thank thee, steward, for thy tidings, and in reward for the same, Franco, the peasant, pledges his word to keep the black secrets of thy blood-stained heart as dark as the night they emulate, until such time as fresh villainy on thy part shall cancel the bond; and now fare thee well, if thou canst find thine equals (which the gods forbid), I now beseech thee to join

them, for to tell thee the truth the air thou breathest brings poison to my nostrils."

"Nay, my worthy Franco, my esteemed Franco, permit me to remain in thy company," cried the unhappy steward as, after casting many furtive and timorous glances around to assure himself that their conversation had been unheard, he drew nearer to the peasant and gazed suspiciously into his face, as if he would fain discern that which underlay the imperturbable good-humour his countenance had again resumed.

"Nay, my worthy Balbus, for I hear my gentle spouse calling me from our homestead yonder and I must presently forth to attend her, dressed in her festal robes, to witness the *cursed rite of baptism*, which shall admit thy lady into the *prating sect* of the Christians, be administered by *their pestilent bishop*. Thou seest how thy words have impressed me, my Balbus; but rest assured, my worthy friend, that should I inadvertently repeat them in the ears of my Franca, I will urge her not to mention the words to her gossip, the friend of thy mistress's bower-woman—fare thee well!"

And with the twinkle once more dancing in his eyes, the peasant turned on his heel, and shortly after disappeared through a doorway leading into one of the conical dwellings by the roadside, through the centre of whose roof the spiral column of blue smoke, and the savoury smell from a cauldron of

salt beef, betokened that the midday meal was preparing.

The miserable Balbus, thus left to his own painful reflections, quickened his steps, and soon joined the throng of people making their way to the church in order to witness the baptism of the noble matron, the Lady Claudiola. The bright May sunshine, the merry laughter and gay blue dresses of the peasants, all combined to render the scene gay and picturesque, but amidst it all the bulky form and gloomy, swarthy face of the steward moved like a dark shadow.

A joyous shout, as of welcome, caused him to raise his eyes, and as he did so, they fell upon the equipage in which Abra and her young friend, Concissa, were seated side by side. The maidens were habited in white garments, festooned with flowers, and never, perhaps, had Abra appeared more lovely; her grief at the approaching departure of her father had spiritualised her beauty, and added a mournful softness to her large dark eyes, which appealed with such an irresistible pathos to the beholder that many a gaze followed the vehicle, slowly threading its way through the narrow, crowded streets, in a mist of tears. Even the coarse nature of Balbus was strangely moved as his eyes rested upon the beautiful apparition.

“For such beauty as thine, fair maid,” he mused, as he pursued his way, “might a Cæsar barter his crown. I marvel not that my master’s heart hath been caught in thy meshes. Ay,” he continued,

while a light suddenly broke across his features, scattering their gloom, "let yon cursed peasant do his worst; I swear, by my father's soul, that I, Balbus, will so skilfully spread my nets that yon pretty dove shall flutter to my young lord's feet, and then let malice repeat and invent its worst. Phaco, my idol! my god! thou wilt forgive thy poor Balbus all, yea a thousand times all, when, through his faithful service, thou shalt at last clasp to thy heart the fair pearl of Poictiers."

CHAPTER VIII

NEVER within the memory of the oldest inhabitant of Pictavium had the gigantic interior of the Church of St. John been so densely crowded as on the occasion of the baptism of Claudiola. As might have been anticipated, the noble birth, the reputed wealth, and the high station of the catechumen would have ordinarily drawn very many to witness the ceremony, but on this special occasion the powerful magnet that attracted the great portion of the community, both Christian and Pagan, to the sacred edifice, consisted in the fact that this holy rite would furnish the last opportunity for the bishop's public ministrations among his people. At the time of which we write, the more ancient custom of setting apart Easter Sunday for the baptism of converts had been superseded by the substitution of Whitsuntide for their public reception into the visible Church of Christ; this for the obvious reason that, as the knowledge of the faith spread to other lands and colder climes, the rigour of an early spring was deemed inexpedient for the ceremony of immersion for the young and tender. As all candidates, whether male or female, were habited in white garments, we can at once trace the

origin of the word "Whit-sunday"—and, in passing, we venture to remind our young readers that our word "candidate," from the Latin *candidus* (white), springs from the same source.

Beseeching indulgence for this digression, let us return to the scene we are endeavouring to depict. The day was the one immediately following Whitsunday. Never had a more cloudless sun shone from bluer heavens. The church, profusely decorated by village maidens, under the auspices of Abra and Concissa, had been transformed into a perfect bower of snowy blossoms, and their pure sweet fragrance, which permeated the aisles of the sacred building, furnished the only incense dreamed of in those early days of the faith.

As the stately form of Claudiola, supported by Rhoda and her nearest kinswoman, appeared, the congregation, with rich musical voices, broke out into the beautiful words of the *Te Deum*, only as recently added to the treasury of the Church as at the baptism of Ambrose. Hilary, arrayed in his simple pastoral robes, then came forward, and taking the lady's tremulous hand in his, welcomed her as a little child into the Father's family. He then, in clear and solemn voice, asked her the three questions still retained in the baptismal service of the Church of England,¹ the first of which had an import to the

¹ While recording the baptism of an adult believer the author begs especially to draw the attention of the reader to the fact that infant baptism, according to the English mode, was known and used.

mind of the early believer which the circumstances of the present day have (excepting in heathen lands) entirely eliminated. By the renunciation of the devil and all his works was implied the abrogation of all false deities, and their supposed powers, a crossing of the Rubicon from the old life of bondage to the rulers of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom and service of the Lord Jesus ; it was, in fact, the Christian soldier's oath, or *sacramentum*, of allegiance to his heavenly King and Captain, to which, no doubt, a beautiful reference is made in the English service in the words which accompany the sign of the cross on the infant's brow.

When Claudiola's last clear, although somewhat tremulous, answer had been given to the questions demanding her reasons for the faith within her, the bishop, again giving her his hand, led her down the marble steps into the huge basin or font, and as the gleaming waters closed over her form, the congregation, led by sweet girlish voices, softly chanted the inspired words, "Buried with Christ by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up by the glory of the Father, so we also should walk in newness of life," and as she emerged once more from their depths, and regained the marble steps, guided by her pastor's hand, Rhoda and her kinswoman stepped forward, bearing between them a long full robe of dazzling whiteness, which they flung around her, and beneath whose ample folds the clinging, dripping garments of

her baptism slipped down upon the marble floor. The bishop then presented her with butter and honey, of which she partook, in token that she was a new-born babe in the family of God ; and then, as she fell upon her knees in grateful and adoring worship, Hilary placed his hands upon her bowed head, and lifting his calm, beautiful face to heaven, prayed that all the types of that earthly service of baptism might be spiritually fulfilled in the heart and life of her who had thus entered upon such sublime and heavenly obligations to her Lord.

Custom, conventionality, and formalism, through the wear and tear of many centuries, have crept in to mar this ancient, beautiful service and to divorce what once formed a glorious whole ; but whether we deplore this separation or not the reason for it is not far to seek. As the primitive Church fell more and more into the error of a superstitious reverence for her ordained pastors, it became by degrees a hard-and-fast rule that none under the office of a bishop might perform the second part of the service, that is, the laying on of hands, while the first portion, wherein consisted the actual baptism of the believer, was allowed to be performed even by a layman ; it therefore at length became an universal custom, where baptisms were urgent and no bishop attainable, to perform the earlier part of the service, and to postpone the second part until the arrival of a bishop—hence the origin of confirmation as a separate service, and the simplicity of its nature which the term itself implies.

To the delight of all present, including the pagan element in the congregation, the good bishop ascended the steps of his rostrum, and after an earnest prayer for the Divine blessing, commenced the last of those discourses which his people were for many days to hear, and which, for their insight into scriptural truth, gospel purity, and eloquence of utterance, rendered him unmistakably the greatest theologian, if not the first preacher, of his age.

Hilary took for his text the last eight verses of St. Matthew's Gospel : " And Jesus spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and on earth ; go ye forth, therefore, teaching all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, teaching them all things whatsoever I have commanded you ; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

" All power, dear children," said the preacher, and his clear, musical voice swept through the church to its farthest limit, " was given unto Him Who, but a short time before, had been crucified and buried in a sepulchre, but Who afterwards had overthrown death and risen from the dead ; and this power was given to Him upon earth as well as in Heaven, for He, Who had reigned in Heaven, would henceforth reign upon earth in the believer's heart, through faith ; for, my dear children, it is faith alone which justifies, the very knowledge of God the Father, and of the Lord Jesus Christ, comes by faith. Justification will be

given to us, whose need of God's grace is so great, to know what things are right. But lest my word or my opinion might be doubted by some, I declare unto you that I preach this truth upon the authority of the prophets and Gospels. Our Lord further says, 'Go forth discipling all nations, baptizing all nations.' First teaching, then baptizing; for, dear children, how is it possible for the body to receive the sacrament of baptism unless the soul has already received the truth of the faith: for baptism is but the symbol of regeneration, the confession of the new birth,¹ there is nothing in baptism apart from faith in Christ,² and those who come to be baptized must first believe in the Son of God.³ He alone can forgive sins,⁴ and faith in Him alone can justify. Our Lord further says: 'Into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost,' of whom there is but one Godhead, one Giver, and the name of the Trinity is God. 'Teaching them to observe all things'—mark the order, my children: He commanded them first to disciple all nations, afterwards to baptize them, lastly to teach them to observe all things; and lest they might think these things to be small and unimportant, He adds, 'whatsoever I have commanded you,' to the end that all who believe should be baptized in the name of the blessed Trinity, that they might do all these things which He had commanded. 'And lo, I

¹ St. Hil., *Pict. Epis., Opera*, Dom Coustant, 348.

² *Ibid.* 234.

³ *Ibid.* 432.

⁴ *Ibid.* 548.

am with you always, to the end of the ages.'” This last clause must have come with unspeakable rest and consolation to many of his hearers, so soon to be bereft of their earthly leader and teacher, exposed to the evil machination of their Arian enemies, against whom their faithful pastor had so strongly and ceaselessly warned them, and therefore the concluding words of his beautiful discourse must have been peculiarly acceptable, not only to his own flock, but to many among his pagan hearers, whose hearts were unconsciously crying out for such an abiding, omnipotent Friend. “In this promise, dear children, ‘*to the end of the ages,*’ He assures them that they will live for ever, and that He will never depart from His believing people, and in promising His presence *to the end of the world,* He does not except one day in which He will not be with them. He had already taught them to pray, ‘Give us this day our daily bread’; and this, beloved children, is God’s daily will for us, that Christ shall dwell in us, for He is the living Bread of which the apostle says, whosoever eateth unworthily acquireth to himself judgment.¹ This means not, my children, material food to be eaten materially, but the spiritual bread, nourishing the soul of the believer—the bread from Heaven—and as this prayer is daily prayed by God’s children, the answer is daily given.² In these words of our gracious Lord, my children, lies the joyful, the most sure hope

¹ St. Hil., *Pict. Epis., Opera*, Dom Coustant, 540.

² *Ibid.* 367.

of the saints. Those only praise Him with a true heart who know him to be the forgiver of sins, the conqueror of death, the destroyer of the devil, the judge of the world, and the giver of eternity : the Lord our God, most blessed for evermore.”¹

The service was ended, and thoughtfully the majority of the congregation wended their homeward way, while others waited to bid a last farewell to their beloved friend and teacher, and once more to beseech an interest in his prayers.

Claudiola Varenilla, her usually sad and anxious countenance lit up with heavenly peace and joy, had departed with her kinswoman and female attendants ; the equipage of Abra and Concissa had followed, but Rhoda still lingered by her husband's side, among his weeping people, mingling her gentle words of consolation with his, and in the utter self-forgetfulness of her noble nature, sustaining him in this his last, and, perhaps, most trying labour of love among his beloved flock. At a short distance from the little group, wrapped in the folds of his toga, the bulky form and scowling countenance of Balbus might have been observed, in apparent unconsciousness of the scene passing before his eyes, yet in reality taking in every detail, and listening to every word. When the last farewell had been given, and with many a tearful and lingering gaze, the party of Christians at length dispersed on their several ways, the steward stepped

¹ St. Hil., *Pict. Epis., Opera*, Dom Coustant, 141.

quickly forward, and falling on his knees before the bishop, exclaimed in a voice, the deep, rough tones of which appeared to be trembling with emotion—

“Pardon, my lord bishop, pardon a poor freed slave, thy servant Balbus !”

At that moment the bright May moon emerged from a passing cloud and, as its mild beams fell upon the face of Hilary as he turned hastily towards the suppliant, it revealed a countenance so pale, and bespeaking such entire exhaustion of mind and body, that Rhoda, in alarm, almost sprang to her husband’s side.

“Nay, my lord, permit me to speak to this worthy man. I will bring thee a report of that which he would say—but stay ! here comes our beloved Martin. Martin, dear friend,” she said as he approached, “thine arm is stronger than mine ; I pray thee support my beloved lord to his house, and bid my maidens instantly to come to my escort while I remain to speak with Balbus. Fear nothing for me while I have the protection of one so trusted by his mistress, our esteemed Claudiola.”

“And now tell me,” continued the lady, as after some hesitation the bishop departed, leaning heavily on his friend’s arm ; seating herself on the branch of a large tree and motioning her companion to stand before her, “for what purpose didst thou seek speech of my lord ?”

“Only, lady, to tell him that my poor heart hath been so stirred by his discourse, that I feel strongly moved also to become a Christian.”

"Nay, but this will greatly pleasure the bishop," said the lady, while a look of intense joy lighted up her calm face ; "but thou knowest, my friend, my lord hath orders to depart for Biterra on the morrow, and he leaves his little flock shepherdless !"

"Yea, fair lady," replied the steward humbly, while his head bent upon his breast, "but it hath come to my poor ears, lady, that—that——"

"Speak, my worthy Balbus, do not fear to tell me that which is in thine heart."

"I have heard, most gracious lady, that thou thyself deignest to instruct certain of thy slaves and others who would fain know more of the Christian faith, for which my soul hath already commenced to crave, and I, Balbus, would humbly beseech thee to permit a poor freed slave to share such unspeakable privileges."

"Thy request shall indeed be granted," continued the lady, while the look of joy deepened on her countenance. "I will send my own freedman, Cassius, to communicate to thee the day and hour for thine attendance, and I advise thee, my friend, as early as may be, to acquaint thy mistress with thy desire, for it will give her great joy to know the same. But I hear the chariot with my maidens approaching. I bid thee farewell, and humbly pray that the dear Lord will perfect that which I cannot but trust He himself hath begun in thine heart."

"Now, the gods be thanked," mused the steward,

in a low but audible voice, as, after Rhoda had departed, followed by her attendants, he swiftly trod his homeward path. "Let yon crack-brained peasant and his croaking spouse say what they will, *this* shall cover all with my lady. And oh, my beloved lord! what will not thy faithful Balbus achieve for thee, now that he hath secured an entrance into the very casket which contains the pearl that possesseth such charms for thy noble heart. What will he not achieve; ay, so long as there remains gold to tempt and slaves to be tempted."

But another shadow besides his own followed the steward, as he at length emerged from the shadows of the trees which had hitherto skirted the roadside; and as he turned into the vineyards surrounding the mansion of Claudiola, a joyous song close at hand broke upon the stillness of the summer night, the tones of which bore, to the startled ears of the majordomo, a strong resemblance to the voice of the peasant Franco.

CHAPTER IX

HILARY departed on the following day for Biterra,¹ with the elder Martin, followed by a retinue becoming his rank as a noble Roman citizen. The younger Martin also accompanied his beloved teacher many miles on his way, but both father and son, who rode on either side of the bishop, respected the sanctity of his pain, at parting with his beloved ones, too deeply, to allow any outward expression of their sympathy to escape them, and for more than an hour the stillness of the forest glades, through which their route led, was broken only by the song of the birds above and the tramp of the horses' feet below—even the retinue who followed abstained from breaking a silence in which, all knew, the soul of their leader was communing with Him who alone can uphold and strengthen the almost breaking heart. But Hilary possessed, in answer to his oft-repeated prayer, the true spirit of martyrdom, and when at length he spoke, his tone was as firm and quiet as usual, as, entirely forgetful of his own grief, he commended, in touching words of the deepest affection, not only his bereaved wife and daughter, but the whole of his flock, to the care and protection of his

¹ See Appendix, 14.

younger friend. And solemnly and prayerfully did Martin accept so profound a responsibility.

But the supreme hour of parting arrived at length, and with an emotion beyond the power of speech to express, teacher and pupil embraced for the last time. Tearless and mute, wrapped in the silence of his unspeakable agony, Martin stood on the hilltop, where his friend and father had left him, following with a hungry gaze the little cavalcade retreating into the distance, until a sudden detour into the highroad hid it from his view ; and then, falling on his face to the ground, he surrendered himself, for one passing moment, to the abandonment of his grief. And through the summer stillness, mingling with its hum of insects and song of birds, rose the almost despairing cry of a bleeding heart—" O my father ! my father ! the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof."

Four hours later, calm almost to sternness, and with a manner that might have betokened indifference, he re-entered the stricken mansion, where the task awaited him of upholding the endurance of Rhoda's widowed heart, of drying his sister's tears, and soothing her childish ebullition of sorrow, of calming the weeping, terrified servants, and (from which his spirit shrank more than from aught beside) administering consolation to the wild, overwhelming grief of the beautiful Abra. As the days passed on, however, and the vehemence of their sorrow gradually abated, the household resumed the even tenor of its way.

When iron is melted in the furnace it is only that it may be beaten into shape upon the anvil: so is character moulded by suffering; and may we not accept it as an almost universal truth that while many of those who appear to be most conformed to the likeness of their Redeemer have passed through the fires of affliction, yet there are others whose unlovely characteristics have become more developed and accentuated by the sorrows they have undergone.

The former was the case with Rhoda. With a disposition naturally yielding, the circumstances of her life had led her to lean too much upon others; but in the crucible of this separation from her husband she had learned the lesson of self-reliance, and when called upon to exercise sole rule over her household, she did so with no abatement of her former gentleness, but with a firmness and quiet dignity that astonished and delighted Martin, who had feared that her tender, submissive heart would have been crushed and broken under such an ordeal. True, she had entirely and for ever lost the lingering bloom of youth—threads of silver shone upon her temples, the fair face had become lined, and the graceful form slightly bent; but her new-born strength of character, and the beauty of her perfect resignation, amply compensated for the loss of outward physical charm. Martin's character had, on the other hand, developed rather than changed—what had appeared hitherto

merely a pensive love of retirement, had merged into a positive asceticism, and the laudable desire to deny self in order to benefit others, had been warped and soured by a system of rigorous self-mortification, which led him to reject the gifts and consolations which a loving Father's hand was daily extending to him "richly to enjoy."

The effect of her father's departure, with its dreaded issue of exile, had so powerfully affected the bodily health of Abra that it was impossible to judge what results this grief had wrought upon her spiritual life. In spite, however, of paling cheek and drooping form, never had the maiden appeared more beautiful; her countenance grew almost ethereal in its pensive loveliness, and the soft languor of her large dark eyes added an almost unearthly beauty to the pathetic young face, saddened by a grief too deep for even a mother's love, or the companionship of the light-hearted Concissa, to have power to assuage.

Claudiola, aware of her son's passionate (although to her mind hopeless) admiration for Abra, entered keenly into the poor mother's grief at her child's failing health, and many and various were the remedies resorted to by the two friends, who, in accordance with the age, were skilled in the use of drugs and herbs; and no words can adequately describe the grief of the mother's heart, as she watched what appeared to her to be the fading of that young life, which was now her sole remaining earthly comfort.

Concissa was often present when Rhoda and her friend prepared their various decoctions, and even assisted the ladies in the work ; for, on the strength of her approaching marriage, it was judged expedient that she should gain some practical knowledge of the feminine art of healing. On one of these occasions Martin entered the apartment where Rhoda and her guests were eagerly discussing a fresh remedy which had been recently recommended. He carried in his hand a large sealed packet, which he gravely, and without a word, handed to Concissa. The effect on the maiden was instantaneous ; with a cry of joy, she bounded forward, scattering the bundle of herbs she had been sorting in every direction, and almost snatching the missive from her brother's outstretched hand, she clasped it to her heart. Had the bearer been her father, her next action, no doubt, would have been to throw her arms round his neck, but, always shy with her brother, she contented herself with rapturously kissing his hand.

"It is from Colfurnius," she cried, while the roses deepened on her cheeks, and her blue eyes sparkled with delight, "from Colfurnius, my own noble lord."

Rhoda and Claudiola looked at each other and smiled—such genuine, girlish delight was truly a refreshing sight in that sorrow-stricken household. Even the stern lines on Martin's face slightly relaxed as his eyes followed the little, round form, as

she darted to her hostess's side and nestled in her embrace.

"Sweet lady," she murmured, as she raised her eyes, in which tears and smiles were blended, "I only wish that my lovely Abra could participate in such a joy as this."

"Ah," sighed Rhoda, as her gaze lingered lovingly on the shining countenance of her young guest, "I would indeed, my child, that thou couldst impart some of thy roses to her cheeks and sparkle to her eyes."

"Herein lies the remedy for her sickness," answered the maiden, glancing at the letter still folded to her breast; "for," she continued, with a mixture of earnestness and shyness, "love can effect a cure when all the herbs that ever grew on earthly soil are powerless to do so—lady, have I thy permission to retire?" And at the almost unconscious sign of assent from her hostess, and in apparent ignorance of the startling effect her words had produced upon the little group of hearers, the maiden swiftly glided from the room.

The heavy curtain had scarcely closed on her slight figure, when Martin approached Rhoda. His face was almost livid, and his voice, when he spoke, was stern and cold.

"Most noble Rhoda," he said, "surely thou wilt not allow such childish and wild utterances to weigh with thy maturer judgment?"

"I can with difficulty comprehend the meaning of thy words, Martin," she answered with dignity; "my daughter's tender years render the subject of her betrothal at present unseemly. I say not, in the course of time, should her precious life be spared to my loneliness, that I would debar her from the natural delight which hath blessed and enriched her mother's life."

"What meanest thou, Rhoda? surely thou wouldst not dare to give in earthly marriage one destined for betrothal to the Heavenly Bridegroom."

Rhoda's face flushed. "I am Abra's mother, Martin, and answerable for my precious child only to God and my husband; but," she answered more gently, "as my husband's dearest friend, the time may come when thy advice upon such matters, for which at the present moment there is no need, may greatly assist me."

"And now, my beloved Claudiola," she exclaimed, turning to her friend, "with thy permission we will retire, for I have to meet my beloved catechumens shortly, and I would fain escort thee to the presence of Abra. Thy company will greatly pleasure her during her mother's brief absence. Farewell, my beloved Martin, until we meet at our midday banquet."

Amidst the many causes for sorrow and anxiety in Rhoda's daily life, her little band of candidates of humble men and women, many of them slaves in her

own and Claudiola's household, yielded an unfailing source of delight, the more so, as she saw the numbers increasing. Martin had assisted her in selecting appropriate portions from her beloved husband's discourses, and the precious thought that his flock was still being guided and helped by his instructions, even during his absence, brought a joy to the faithful and loving heart of the bereaved wife that no anxiety could trouble or sorrow cloud.

A few days after Balbus had petitioned to become a member of the class of Rhoda's scholars, a similar request was tendered by Franco on his own behalf and on that of his wife, the honest and faithful Franca, Abra's foster-mother ; but while the improvement the steward made in the knowledge of divine truth was so remarkable that it caused the greatest delight to Rhoda and his mistress, it was entirely otherwise with Franco and his spouse. In a most unaccountable way the contemplation of Balbus, in his rapid strides towards the attainment of Christian knowledge, seemed to absorb the mental faculties of this worthy pair. Whenever Rhoda chanced to raise her eyes from the page she had been reading, it was generally to encounter the dark eyes of the steward gazing upon her in fixed interest, while those of Franco, and often of his wife, were resting, in an expression she could never wholly fathom, on the swarthy countenance of the steward.

On this particular occasion Rhoda, who for some

weeks had been engaging the attention of her humble friends with Hilary's exposition of the 52nd Psalm, took the latter portions for their instruction, wherein her husband dwelt on the subject of sin and pardon. "No one," she read, "is able to forgive sins but God, for to Christ alone has been given the power to cancel sins. He Who is the maker of the universe can alone pardon our sins and no one else, and this confession of sins must be made to God only¹ and in this life, for we have only in this life power to choose between good and evil,² but the consequences of that choice are eternal,³ and the moment the life departs from the body, our eternal reward, whether for good or evil, is absolutely fixed.⁴ For we know, when Dives wished to pass across the gulf to Abraham, he could not.

"But, dear friends," she continued, still quoting Hilary's words, "while the law is unable to justify us and to pardon our sins, through faith (which alone can justify),⁵ God will pardon all our sins to the uttermost, not according to our merits, but according to His grace of whom the Angel declared, 'Thou shalt call His name *Jesus*, for He shall save His people from their sins.'⁶ Oh, how blessed is this Name, which Angels and Archangels adore, and which Devils tremble at, and of which it is written, '*Whoso-*

¹ See Appendix, 15.

² St. Hil., *Pict. Epis., Opera*, Dom Coustant, 548.

³ *Ibid.* 73. ⁴ *Ibid.* 231. ⁵ *Ibid.* 593. ⁶ *Ibid.* 243.

ever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' ”

Rhoda followed these words of high and holy import by a few gentle remarks on the nature of sin. And, again quoting from her husband's writings, she continued : “ All men are born in sin, there are none righteous, excepting the Lord Jesus Christ ; He alone of all the human race is without sin. He who died for our sins ; as the apostle says : ‘ If when we were sinners, Christ died for us, much more being justified by His blood we shall be saved from wrath through Him ;¹ Christ died for sinners that He might save them from His wrath, and sanctify them through His blood, through the power of His Resurrection,” and with these inspiring words of hope and encouragement she dismissed her humble friends to their various homes and occupations. Balbus, however, lingered even after the last of his companions had departed, and seeing his hesitation, Rhoda, who had risen to depart, again resumed her seat and invited him to come nearer.

“ Is there aught, my friend,” she asked kindly, “ upon which thou wouldst open thy heart to me ? If there be, fear not to do so, it will give me pleasure should I in any way be able further to enlighten thee.”

“ Emboldened by such graciousness, most noble lady,” the steward answered, adopting his usual

¹ St. Hil., *Pict. Epis., Opera*, Dom Coustant, 101.

attitude of humility, "may I inquire if all the desires of man's heart possess the nature of sin?"

"I would, my worthy Balbus, that the bishop were here to answer thy question aright; wilt thou tell me more particularly to what desires thou alludest?"

"I speak, noble lady, on the behalf of one who is dearer to the heart of Balbus than the blood which pulses through it at this moment."

"And concerning what desire of his dost thou thus inquire?"

"He hath conceived an affection for a young maiden, and I would fain ask if such an outgoing of the heart be sinful in one who is a baptized Christian?"

"Surely not," answered the lady, while a slight tinge of colour mounted to her cheek, "providing the object of his affections is worthy of his regard."

"The maiden of whom I speak is also a Christian, and purer than the snowflake ere it reacheth the earth."

"And is there no obstacle to their union?"

"None whatever, my lady, beyond that which the unkindness of human hands and hearts may interpose. Oh, mine honoured, my beloved teacher," cried the steward, falling on his knees and prostrating himself at her feet, "wilt thou deign, of thy clemency, to put forth thy powerful influence to consummate a union which can bring naught but blessing in its train?"

"Rise, Balbus," answered the lady; "such a posture becometh not the presence of a mortal like thyself. I can promise thee nothing until my ignorance is further enlightened concerning those for whom thou desirest my favour."

The steward rose to his feet. "Lady," he said, while for once the reality of his motives ennobled his manner and solemnised his voice, "the home-born slave before thee hath naught beyond his poor word to tender; but say, noble lady, shouldst thou find that word to be the truth, wilt thou pledge thy word to use thine influence on his behalf whose happiness is dearer to this worthless heart than aught beside?"

"Nay, Balbus," answered Rhoda, "I cannot pledge my word to such as thee; but rest assured that thy humble friend shall have any assistance I may think right to bestow, should I learn upon further inquiry that such an interposition on my part would not be ill-judged."

The steward started, and for a moment seemed to forget the high station of her in whose presence he stood. "*Humble!*" he repeated; "a prouder heart never beat. *Friend!* ay, as truly the friend of Balbus as is the sun in yonder heaven to the poorest wretch on whom it shines."

"Then, of whom dost thou speak?" she asked, in a voice of astonishment.

The steward again resumed his humble demeanour,

and, with his head upon his breast, stood for a moment in silence.

"Speak, Balbus," repeated the lady; "say for whom it is thou beseechest my favour."

"For my Lord Phaco."

Rhoda rose abruptly from her seat. "What folly is this?" she exclaimed, her usually quiet face flushed and her gentle lips trembling with indignation. "How darest thou intrude thy master's affairs upon my notice? Begone instantly from my presence, to which I can only readmit thee upon thy most humble expression of contrition."

"I go, most noble lady," rejoined the slave, with a most respectful and profound obeisance, "and believe me that the pain of thy dismissal is surpassed by that of the ruin of the highest hopes that ever beamed upon a weary heart. The Christian faith can henceforth be nought to Balbus than a glorious but delusive dream."

"Stay," exclaimed Rhoda, as the steward, with another obeisance, turned to leave the apartment; "how can my displeasure, at the liberty thou hast taken with one so far above thee, affect thy belief in our most holy faith?"

"Lady," was the mournful answer, "there exist hearts, even among high-born pagans, who would not have spurned a poor slave's prayer on behalf of the master he has served faithfully and loves devotedly."

"Nay," answered the lady, as her momentary anger departed and her pale features once more resumed their usual gentleness; "I would not in any way that might be avoided hinder thy entrance into our most holy religion, but how can any advice I might be able to give thee affect thy master? more especially as he hath espoused the cause of the blasphemous Arian heretics, and therefore should I deeply deplore his union with any Christian maid."

"Most gracious lady," exclaimed Balbus, "believe not the unkind tongues that would hinder the absent from the possession of the inestimable boon of thy favour. If for a short time my noble master was led away by false teachers, he hath altogether abjured such. In a letter he hath deigned to send to his servant, touching other matters, and which his post brought to thy unworthy Balbus only this morning, he hath added the information that, in consequence of what he hath witnessed during his late journey, he hath been led wholly to renounce the teaching of those heretics, and hath entered the ranks of the orthodox Christians. He hath also intimated his intention of returning to my noble lady at an early date, and oh, mine honoured teacher, thou who hast condescended to bestow thy wise counsels upon the slaves of his household, wilt thou withhold the like kindness from their lord, in this time of his distress of soul and sorrow of heart?"

"Nay, Balbus," Rhoda answered, her usual kindli-

ness of manner rather increased than abated, in her regret for the little natural ebullitions she had shown, "if thy master hath abjured the false teaching of the Arian bishops, and hath in reality become one of us, what should hinder me from receiving my husband's old friend, and the son of my beloved neighbour, into my home and heart? On the contrary, rest assured that it will give me great satisfaction if, in any way, I may be the means, not only of leading him into a clear knowledge of the truth, but also of assisting him as far as my poor influence may be effective in that which appeareth, from thy words, to be a natural and laudable desire."

"Know, most noble lady," exclaimed the steward, in a transport of joy falling upon his knees and raising Rhoda's robe to his lips, "thou hast indeed shown to thy poor Balbus the triumph of thy faith over all other. None less than thy Divine Master could have inspired the utterance of such gracious words."

"I trust it may, indeed, be so," said Rhoda meekly, and then added (dare we venture to suggest in some slight degree prompted by the natural curiosity of her sex), "but thou hast omitted to inform me of the damsel's name who hath thus won thy master's regard; is she also known to me?"

"Pardon thy servant," was the low answer, "but that may only be given from my lord's own lips—an information, most gracious lady, that he will be more willing to bestow than, perchance, thou to solicit."

As Balbus, after being dismissed from Rhoda's presence, passed through the corridors leading to the servants' entrance, he became conscious of a sound like that of a swift, soft tread in front of him ; hurrying rapidly forward he was greatly relieved to find no one in sight, with the exception of Franco, who had fallen asleep in the doorway while waiting for his wife, at that moment seated in earnest conversation with Alva in a distant portion of the mansion.

CHAPTER X

THE almost family relations, the results of the patriarchal system, which existed between the nobility of Pictavium and their retainers and tenants, possessed the advantage of combining the interests of the two classes. The betrothal, therefore, of the peasant maiden, Flavella, the eldest daughter of Franco and his worthy spouse, would, under any circumstances, have elicited Rhoda's warm and practical sympathy, but in this particular instance the fact that the bride-elect was the foster-sister of her own child greatly intensified the lady's interest both on the girl's and her parents' behalf. In view of the approaching nuptials, therefore, Abra and Concissa, attended by the faithful Alva, wandered forth in search of appropriate flowers wherewith to decorate the Church of St. Peter's for the occasion.

They had passed through the grounds of the mansion to a meadow by the river's bank where a rare kind of flower, the forget-me-not of to-day, grew in great abundance. Abra, wearied even with so slight an exercise of physical power, had thrown herself back among the cushions brought by Alva for the purpose, under the shadow of a willow tree by the

water's edge, and having begged her companions to proceed in their search without her, she drew forth the roll transcribed for her by her mother's hand, which contained some beautiful selections from Hilary's commentaries.

She turned to his discourse on the 25th chapter of St. Matthew, and her eye rested on the words "And the wise answered, not so ; lest there be not enough for us and you," upon which passage Hilary had thus commented :—

"In these words it is shown very clearly that just as the quantity of oil given to keep the lamp burning was only sufficient for each one of the virgins,¹ so not one of us can ever be helped by the works or by the merits of another ; and when those who are repeatedly urged to buy for themselves put off doing so until too late, until death comes upon them, like the virgins with the extinguished lamps, the Heavenly Bridegroom will shut the door upon them, saying unto them, 'I never knew you.' For death ends all opportunities. But on the other hand those whose lamps are shining when death comes to them go in at once with the Bridegroom to the wedding, for those who thus die in Christ are immediately admitted into Glory."

"I would fain be found among the number of the wise virgins," mused the girl, as she gazed upward

¹ St. Hil., *Pict. Epis., Opera*, Dom Coustant, 242 ; *ibid.*, 415. See Appendix, 16.

through the green tracery of the willow boughs into the clear blue sky beyond, "but why did He, who is the Heavenly Bridegroom, allow those wicked Arians to triumph, and to banish my beloved father so far from his little Abra." As she pursued her sad thoughts her eyes once more turned to the fair scroll resting on her knees, and were suddenly arrested by a sentence which seemed to her as direct an answer to her doubts as if that dear vanished voice had spoken them in her ear.

"He was wounded for our transgressions; He was smitten for our griefs, that by His smiting we might have healing, and through His Death we might gain eternal life.¹ God spared not for our sakes His only begotten Son—He who knew what the keepers of the Vineyard would do to the Son of His Love, yet sent Him to them—that by His sufferings and death He might purchase for us everlasting life."²

A tender light stole over the young face, and tears, not of sorrow, glistened on the drooping lashes, as the maiden read, and re-read, those precious words, drinking in their comfort, and wholly unconscious the while of a terrible danger drawing nearer and nearer every moment.

The assurance of her companions that they would keep within sight had prevented Abra from feeling any fear at so slight a separation. Neither she nor they, however, had noticed a herd of cattle grazing

¹ St. Hil., *Pict. Epis., Opera*, Dom Coustant, 423.

² *Ibid.* 196.

at the farther extremity of the meadow. This ignorance of neighbourhood, as it proved, was not entirely mutual, for one of their number, a fierce and powerful beast, attracted by the flutter of Concissa's garments, probably as the lively girl climbed and tripped about the river's bank, had trotted briskly forward. At the sound of his rapid and heavy tread, Abra suddenly raised her eyes, only to encounter those of the enraged brute, not many yards distant, glaring upon her in fiery wrath. Thirteen is not the age for deliberate reflection in the hour of sudden danger ; so, scattering prudence to the winds, the poor girl, with a shriek of terror, too faint, however, to reach the ears of her companions, dashed forward she knew not whither. Her bovine pursuer, responding with a terrific roar, made a sudden plunge towards the slight flying figure, and in a few seconds would have gained upon her and probably would have gored her to death, but at that instant a huge stone was hurled against the brute's forehead with such force as, for a moment, to arrest his course ; the next, maddened with rage and pain, he had rushed towards his victim more furiously than ever, but in that pause, instantaneous as it was, Abra was saved. Two strong arms had suddenly grasped her with a force she could never forget, and with a bound, which seemed to her numbed faculties at the time like a leap into space, she was landed safely on

the farther bank of the brook, and remembered no more.

When at length she regained consciousness, it was to find herself lying on her own couch at home, with her mother's arms around her, Concissa weeping at her feet, and Alva, white and tearful, anointing a bruise upon her arm with fragrant ointment. Half unconsciously her eyes wandered through the group as if in search of another form, besides those of the dear ones around her, and finally rested with a questioning gaze upon her mother's face.

"Try to sleep, my precious one," was the low, faltering whisper, "do not speak yet; thou shalt know all soon."

"Mother," she whispered, with a beseeching gaze in her dark eyes, "I know all now—the furious beast!—the brook!—" and she shuddered, almost convulsively, as she spoke; "but, mother, I would fain know who saved me from his horns?"

"Phaco."

A glad, tender smile parted Abra's beautiful lips, and shone in her eyes, but she asked no more questions, and in less than five minutes she was sleeping calmly, with the same happy smile still resting upon her fair young face.

Many were the fears entertained concerning the effect such a terrifying and painful adventure would probably have upon Abra's fragile frame and delicate

health, and none seemed to share these apprehensions more deeply than her deliverer Phaco.

Rhoda's gratitude for his brave and timely succour, which had been the means, under Divine providence, of saving her darling's life, was deep and heartfelt, and this, combined with her satisfaction at hearing that he had abandoned the false teaching of the Arian heretics, rendered the young nobleman's almost daily visits of inquiry and condolence very acceptable, and served to cement, more strongly than ever, the friendship between the two houses. But as the days passed onwards, and Abra began to share in the receptions of Phaco's visits, the effect of her late terrible experience appeared to have had a salutary effect, rather than otherwise, upon the young girl's health ; the sparkle gradually returned to her eye, the colour to lips and cheek, and her soft voice was even occasionally heard blending with Concissa's merry laughter. The thankful happiness of the mother knew no bounds, and it was her delight to pour forth her expressions of the growing esteem and permanent gratitude in which she held her son into the delighted ears of her friend Claudiola. Martin alone, however, of all the household, continued to hold aloof from the young nobleman, and to regard his visits with a growing dislike. It seemed to Rhoda that, as Abra daily increased in health and natural spirits, her husband's former pupil sank further into a gloomy sternness of character, and she looked forward eagerly to the

arrival of the elder Martin, in the hope that his genial company and fatherly advice might help to dissipate the cloud which seemed, at that period, to overwhelm his son. She could not understand the cause of this brooding melancholy, but deeming it might probably arise from his doubts of Phaco's having in reality eschewed the heretical opinions of his former friends, she hastened to him, one evening, with the joyful news that the young man, who had for some weeks past been reading Hilary's discourse on the Trinity, had that morning returned to her the scroll with the assurance that her husband's arguments had been of so convincing a nature that every lingering doubt had departed from his mind, and henceforth he hoped to devote himself heart and soul to the propagation of the true and orthodox faith in Christ, the Divine Son of a Divine Father ; but no responsive smile lit up Martin's severe face.

"My gentle friend," he said, "words—mere words—are worth the breath that utters them, and no more."

Rhoda's face flushed. "Why is it, Martin, that thou wilt insist in so misjudging one who hath wrought *me*, if not *thee*, such unspeakable service. What might my darling's fate have been, had he not——"

"I would," Martin answered, breaking in upon her words with a voice which actually trembled with some internal and powerful emotion, "I would to God that ere——"

"Ere what, my friend?" asked Rhoda, regarding him with a fixed, almost horrified gaze.

"I would," he answered, no longer endeavouring to restrain his passionate emotion, "I would that Abra, the purest, the loveliest flower ever fashioned by the Divine Creator's hand, had been tossed into Heaven from the horns of yonder fierce beast, than that she should live to become the bride of Phaco Varenilla!"

And without a glance towards Rhoda's white and horror-stricken countenance, he hastily, and with heavy tread, strode from the apartment.

CHAPTER XI

RHODA remained, for the first few moments after Martin had left her, in a condition of almost absolute bewilderment, as her thoughts whirled in chaotic confusion round one central fact, burning itself into her very brain. Martin, her husband's and her own favoured friend, the trusted guardian of her temporary widowhood, who had more than once repeated to her his unfaltering determination of celibacy—Martin loved her little Abra. This fact stood out, as a fact, never again to be hurled back by any effort of thought into non-existence ; and the gentle mother shuddered, for Martin's sake, as she faced it. But even amidst all the pain that this astounding discovery brought with it, it enshrined one ray of comfort to Rhoda's heart. In the increasing favour and even affection in which she had begun to regard Phaco, Martin's evident dislike to the handsome young nobleman had distressed her in proportion to the high esteem in which she had been accustomed to regard the judgment of her husband's dearest earthly friend ; but now all this was explained, and was not to be attributed, as Rhoda had sometimes feared, to a fuller knowledge of the young

man's antecedents, or to a clearer conception of character than she possessed, but to—she almost started as the words shaped themselves to her mind—to the jealousy of love. Gradually and unconsciously, by way of contrast, her thoughts wandered to Phaco, his brave and timely succour in her darling's hour of peril—and, for the thousandth time, the mother blessed her child's deliverer in her heart—his apparently increasing delight in reading her husband's discourses, especially those written in defence of the creed of Nicæa, his gentle courtesy to herself, and last, but not least, the intense affection he had inspired in the heart of one humble member of his household, Balbus. But, with the name of the steward, there suddenly flashed into Rhoda's mind the memory of the conversation she had held with her catechumen some months since, and which had almost faded from her mind. She recalled it all now, especially that portion of it in which the major-domo had pleaded for her influence in seconding the success of his lord's suit with the maiden of his heart; she remembered her passing wonderment as to who the damsel might be, and, for the second time that evening, within the space of one hour, she experienced a sense of overwhelming astonishment as the full import of the man's importunate pleading dawned upon her—that it was no other than her own daughter, for whom Balbus had pleaded on his master's behalf. At this point all her meditations

focussed themselves into the burning question, Was Phaco worthy of her Abra? followed by another of almost equal import to the faithful wife's heart, Were her lord present, would he sanction the betrothal? But all further reflections, whether painful or otherwise, were impossible, for at that instant, as if conjured up by her thoughts, Phaco was announced.

The unusual agitation of Rhoda's manner, and the deep flush upon her cheek, did not escape the young nobleman's attention, and never had the high-bred courtesy of his manner appeared more soothing or attractive as, raising the hand she extended almost reverently to his lips, he led her to a seat and remained standing before her.

"Sweet lady," he said, "pardon the intrusion of so late a visit, but, believe me, silence hath become intolerable to me, and I can support the suspense, with which I await thy sentence, no longer!"

"My sentence? What meanest thou, Phaco?"

"I come, most noble Rhoda, with my beloved mother's consent, to petition thee for a boon as far exceeding my deserts as the light of the sun surpasseth that of the glowworm."

"And what is this boon, Phaco," the lady answered faintly, "for which thou pleadest?"

The nobleman dropped on one knee, and again taking Rhoda's hand, held it in both of his, and while the colour rushed to his temples and his calm voice faltered, he answered—

"I ask thee for thy daughter Abra."

"O Phaco!" sobbed the lady, as withdrawing her hand from his grasp, she covered her face to hide her tears, "wouldst thou rob me of my only treasure?"

"Nay, Rhoda, for in giving thy priceless blossom to thine unworthy Phaco, would she not tarry by thy side; while other maidens, like thy gentle guest Concissa, are torn from their paternal homes and separated from their early ties by thousands of leagues, thy beautiful and tender Abra would tarry ever in thy neighbourhood to beguile thy loneliness with her precious presence even after, with a bliss beyond my power to contemplate, the consummation of our union should be effected."

Rhoda's sobs gradually ceased, and Phaco continued—

"My friend, thou canst not deem me more unworthy of winning such a treasure than I hold myself to be, but if love, true, devoted, eternal, can dare to compensate for deficiency of merit, such love I offer to thy peerless child; but, O Rhoda, refuse me not, I implore thee, that for which I would gladly barter my rank, my possessions, my s—, my very life itself to gain!"

"Hush! my friend, such words ill become one who professeth to be a follower of Him who hath taught us to 'set our affections on things above, not on the things in this earth.'"

"Is Abra of the earth? I know not, but, O Rhoda, forbid me not to tell her of my love."

"If I do not forbid thee, Phaco," answered Rhoda, after a few moments of silence, "it is only on one condition that I withhold not my consent. I must know her father's will on the subject before I can countenance any formal betrothal; but my darling's tender years will not make this a very hard stipulation, my Phaco, nor do I deem—since thou hast abjured the false teachings of the heretical Arians—my noble husband will refuse his consent (although I know he hath entertained higher and more heavenly aspirations for his child's future) to her union with one who hath saved her from deadly peril, and who is, moreover," she added with a smile of rare sweetness, "his Rhoda's esteemed and beloved friend."

For one instance a deep shadow crossed Phaco's handsome face, but it swiftly vanished in an expression of almost radiant gladness, so utterly foreign to that usually haughty unmoved countenance, that it appealed to Rhoda's heart with a force beyond the power of mere words to effect, and perhaps led her to add, with an arch smile—

"If to-morrow would not be too early for thy convenience, Phaco, perchance, I might allow thee an opportunity of seeing Abra alone in the orange-grove for half-an-hour in the forenoon."

The delighted Phaco had scarcely left Rhoda's presence when Concissa almost flew into the apartment.

"My beloved lady," cried the lively damsel, as, forgetful of all decorum, she threw her arms around her hostess, "I know it all—I read it in his face—nay, more than that, he bade me repair to thy chamber instantly. Oh, how grand he looked, almost as handsome as my own noble Colfurnius. Oh, lady Rhoda, I am so happy for my beloved Abra."

The lady folded the affectionate girl in her embrace, and tenderly smoothed her fair locks.

"I know not, thou saucy damsel, whether thy foolish words have not had something to do with affecting my mind in the matter—but now, child, retire to thy bedchamber, as it is time those bright eyes were closed in slumber. I need not urge thee, Concissa, to take heed that thou repeat not a word of all this to Abra; she will know soon enough; and oh!" exclaimed the lady, as the curtain closed over Concissa's graceful figure, "if this should not be in accordance with the dear Lord's will for my child, may He keep it from fulfilment."

In the meantime a conversation of a wholly different character had been held in a distant part of the mansion, where, in the apartment set aside for her special use, the faithful Alva sat in company with her bosom friend Franca, Abra's foster-mother. Both women were nearing middle life and alike wore the long garments of various colours, something like a cassock in shape, over an under-bodice or vest of blue, the usual dress of the Pictavian

women. Alva's face was the handsomer and more refined of the two, but the kindly and motherly expression of Franca's homely but honest countenance more than compensated for the absence of female beauty.

"Alva," she was saying in an earnest and somewhat anxious tone of voice, "dost thou really think that our lady regards the young lord with favour?"

"I feel assured thereof, Franca; his visits are ever welcomed, and our mistress believeth him to be true in his denouncement of his former favour of the Arian heresy."

"But, Alva, he is not true; Franco assureth me that the Lord Phaco still retaineth his ancient convictions."

"But how can thine husband be assured of this?"

"I know not, my Alva, but only this I know, that Franco's wisdom surpasseth that of any other man's I have ever met, and he constantly hath said to me that neither the master nor the man are what they seem to be."

"Balbus, I own, is base enough; little doth my gentle lady know the cruelty and dishonesty of the wretch of whom she thinks so highly, and yet if it were not for Julia's hatred of him, perhaps neither you nor I would wot of his evil doings. But, as I informed thee before, Franca, Julia knows the very man who sold the poison to him that ended the gentle slave boy's life, and her uncle, in his dying

hour, told her that Balbus, with his own hands, did the poor old Nubian to death ; but there is no one in all the household since the death of the girl's uncle who wots of these murders besides Julia herself."

"Why doth she not proclaim him to his mistress?"

"Because he is too powerful among the servants and too high in the Lord Phaco's favour, if not in his lady's, for her story to be believed against his word, more especially as there hath existed this ancient quarrel between them, of which all the household are aware. But now, my Franca, let us turn our words to pleasanter matters. Hast thou yet heard from thy good Flavella since she hath left thy roof for her worthy husband's?"

"Ay, that we have," answered the mother, her face all aglow with delight at the mention of her beloved daughter's name and happiness. "Every maiden does not win such a spouse as hath fallen to my girl's lot ; the damsel is as joyous as the day is long. I only wish, my Alva, that my precious foster charge had in her high position as good a hope of a happy life as hath my own humbly born daughter."

"But, my Franca, we know nothing against the young lord, nor, indeed, have I heard one word of her betrothal to any man as yet ; but even were she to be given in marriage to the Lord Phaco, why shouldst thou grieve, my friend, if he is what he professes to be, a true Christian, and if he loves our youthful lady?"

“Alva, you and I speak in the dark, we know nothing ; but my Franco is not a man to speak without knowledge, and although he doth not pour out his thoughts into my ear as he doth his money into my lap, yet hath he told me enough to make my heart heavy concerning her who was once my beloved babe, and were I the Christian I long to be, I would pray long and fervently that her betrothal to the Lord Phaco might never be.”

“Nay, dear friend,” Alva answered gently, “why shouldst thou tarry for aught ; let me, I pray thee, repeat some sweet words for thy support which God’s faithful servant, our honoured master, hath writ :—

“‘Prayer is the loving provision of God, adapted to meet our infirmities.¹ He hears us and pities and saves. Prayer need not always be in words, inasmuch as our need often exceeds the power of words to express it, and the voice in prayer is silent.² For true prayer is not from the lips but from the heart. The heart is the real place for prayer, therefore we may pray always in whatever place we are, and yet none of us really know how to pray as we ought,³ not even the blessed Paul, the great teacher of the Gentiles, could teach us how to pray ; but the Holy Spirit covers our ignorance with His groanings which cannot be uttered ; and even those prayers which cannot be granted God hears. Prayer must

¹ St. Hil., *Pict. Epis., Opera*, Dom Coustant, 261.

² *Ibid.* 535.

³ *Ibid.* 85.

be always made to God, for He heareth us not according to our merit but according to His tender loving-kindness towards us.'¹

"Are not these gracious words, my Franca?"

"They are, indeed, Alva," answered the peasant, while her eyes overflowed with tears, "and even embolden a poor, ignorant woman such as I to fall before the footstool of so tender and gracious a Father. And now, my Alva, I must leave thee, for my goodman will be awaiting me without, and I may not keep him longer tarrying for his unworthy spouse," and with a warm embrace the faithful friends parted.

On the morrow the news floated rapidly throughout the length and breadth of the town that the Lord Phaco Varinella and the youthful Lady Abra—the fair pearl of Poitiers—had plighted their troth, the one to the other, and their formal betrothal only awaited the sanction of the absent bishop.

¹ St. Hil., *Pict. Epis., Opera*, Dom Coustant, 242.

CHAPTER XII

AN increasing uneasiness, in consequence of the elder Martin's prolonged absence, had for many weeks past been entertained by Rhoda and the various members of her household, and their fears concerning him were painfully confirmed by the arrival of a messenger from Tours, who conveyed the mournful tidings that the esteemed and noble citizen was lying dangerously ill in his own home of a fever he had contracted in his journey from Biterra. The message concluded with a fond and urgent entreaty for his son and daughter instantly to repair to him.

Great and universal was the grief at such woeful tidings. Martin, with his usual calm endurance, received them in absolute silence, and only the increased pallor of his cheek and lip and an unusual gentleness, almost amounting to tenderness, towards his sister, betokened the anxiety of his heart.

Concissa, on the contrary, gave way to the most violent demonstration of sorrow, which required the united ministrations of those around her to assuage even in the smallest degree, and only did the grief-stricken maiden mitigate her paroxysm of inordinate weeping upon the quiet assurance of her brother that,

unless she exercised more control over her emotion, he absolutely refused to conduct her to the bedside of their beloved father.

A threat so terrible to the affectionate heart of the sobbing girl had the desired effect, and not many hours after the arrival of the bearer of the melancholy news, Concissa, white and woebegone, and in her subdued sorrow looking far more pitiful than during its former unrestrained expression, left the stately home which had sheltered her for so many months of her happy girlhood to return no more; and though entirely unconscious of the fact that she would never meet her beloved friends on earth again, yet was the parting on both sides too sad and affecting for the power of words to express.

So great was Abra's grief at bidding adieu to her lively and affectionate friend, that even her new and radiant happiness in the consciousness of Phaco's love for her, was not able to conquer it, and many were the tears she shed in secret for her absent Concissa.

Rhoda, on the other hand, although entirely sympathising with her departed guests, and deeply experiencing the blank caused by the absence of the light-hearted and amiable Concissa, could not but welcome the temporary absence of her husband's esteemed friend, Martin, at this particular juncture. For the first time, however, since the departure of Hilary, she experienced a full realisation of the loss

her husband's absence was to her, and although Abra, at her desire, had written a letter¹ to her father in which she had set forth all her praises of her lover's character and magnificence, and a brief account of the exquisite gems and silken robes she only awaited the bishop's consent to accept, and in the most tender and dutiful language had implored his sanction to their betrothal, yet Rhoda knew that years, perhaps, might elapse before an answer to his child's pleading could be received from the distant exiled father, and her heart sank within her as she contemplated the difficulties which Phaco's avowal of his passionate love had occasioned, and which she was now called upon to meet in her own unaided judgment. But even as these rose one by one before her, a treasured word from her beloved husband's lips seemed to float into her mind, as if wafted to her from those distant Phrygian shores.

"Prayer to God must be without ceasing, not only when those things which we fear have come to pass, but when we begin to fear they will happen, for the Lord freely bestows His loving protection in answer to the prayer of faith."²

Calmed and soothed by the sweet message from those revered lips, the lonely wife turned, in a whole-hearted surrender, to Him who never for one moment leaves His children unaided, and who gives,

¹ See Appendix, 17.

² St. Hil., *Pict. Epis.*, *Opera*, Dom Coustant, 139.

as her husband loved to remind himself and others, "not according to our merits, but according to our needs."

There was one friendship, however, which possessed a great solace for Rhoda's lonely, loving heart, which lay in the deepening, mutual attachment between herself and Claudiola. The latter lady's mode of life had entirely changed since her reception into the Church of Christ. The wealth she had formerly delighted to hoard for the future benefit of her idolised son, she now lavished freely on her poorer neighbours.

The schools founded by Hilary¹ formed a constant object of her munificence, and many of the peasants of Pictavium were profiting by greater facilities thus offered for their instruction; and among the many adult scholars who had lately availed themselves of this privilege was Franco, who showed a greater ability in his efforts to acquire secular knowledge than he had in the far higher pursuit of the truth of the Christian faith, and to the unspeakable delight and awe of his worthy wife, he was soon able to read both in the Roman and Pictavian tongue.

One beautiful morning in the early autumn, about a week after the departure of the travellers for Tours, Rhoda and Claudiola were sitting together in earnest conversation in one of the apartments of Claudiola's

¹ See Appendix, 18.

mansion. Rhoda had visited her friend in order to inform her that a trusty post had been despatched with Abra's letter to her father.

"But I know not when, or even if ever, it will reach my beloved lord," she said mournfully.

"Nay, beloved Rhoda," was the affectionate answer; "indulge not such fears. My Phaco—or rather, may I not venture to style him, *our* Phaco?—hath much influence with the minions of Cæsar, notwithstanding his having abjured the false teaching held in high quarters against the pure and orthodox faith. Will it not pleasure him, thinkest thou, to obtain a passport for such a missive sent by the beloved hand of the maiden? I sometimes fear he loves her almost to the limit of idolatry. But here he comes to answer for himself!" she exclaimed, as the imposing figure of the young nobleman appeared in the doorway. "My Phaco, come hither, and assure our beloved Rhoda that thou wilt use the utmost of thy power with those in authority, so that her own wifely letter and also that of thy beloved Abra shall be presented, with as small delay as may be, to our martyr bishop, the exiled Hilary."

A shadow, almost more brief than the glance which detected it, crossed the handsome countenance of the son, as he seated himself by his mother's side.

"I was not aware that thy post had already departed, most noble Rhoda," he said, with his usual courteousness of manner. "I will instantly despatch

Balbus in his wake, with my secret instructions. I think thou knowest somewhat of his fidelity, and wilt, therefore, not fear but that such will be obeyed."

"I do indeed trust the faithfulness of thy worthy steward, Phaco, but there is One above us all to whom I have committed these letters to my beloved lord, and if it be His will they will arrive at length at their distant destination."

Phaco did not immediately respond; for some moments he sat in silence with his head bent slightly forward, as if buried in thought. At length he rose abruptly, and with an unwonted pallor on his cheek, said, addressing Rhoda—

"Lady, I leave thy gentle presence and that of my revered mother, in order to give my secret instructions to Balbus; he will be made acquainted presently with my commands, which rather than disregard the faithful wretch would lay down his life. But should this business on which I shall forthwith dismiss him miscarry, nay, further, should results wholly unexpected arise therefrom, should there even not be lacking the malice of lying tongues who would slander me to thy gentle ears, lady, wilt thou *here and now* give me thy gracious assurance that thou wilt never believe that aught else than my unspeakable devotion, my true and unfaltering love to thy daughter, alone and entirely inspires the motives with which I dismiss Balbus to—to his work."

The last words were almost spoken in a whisper, and Rhoda glanced up in astonishment.

"Why dost thou require such assurance?" she answered somewhat coldly; "thinkest thou that if there were room in my heart for the smallest doubt concerning thy truth or fidelity, I would have allowed thy lips to breathe one word of love into the pure young ears of my precious child."

Phaco bowed and turned to his mother.

"And thou, my mother, wilt thou always believe, whatever may chance in the future, that thy son's love and devotion to the empress of his soul, his beautiful Abra, is true and deathless?"

"Surely, my son, but thy manner grieves me sorely. What can chance in the future to make it needful that either of us should have cause to remember the assurance it is simply a pleasure for us to give thee now?"

But with no other answer beyond a second bow, Phaco left the apartment.

At an early hour the next morning, a crowd of peasants assembled to witness the departure of Balbus on some important, but unknown errand. He went forth in such style as befitted his station as the steward of a wealthy nobleman, and carried a pouch comfortably lined for the greater convenience of his journey. His bulky legs, moreover, bestrode one of the best steeds his master's stables could produce, and all this, added to the freshness

of a cloudless, balmy October morning, and the admiring gaze of the villagers, combined in raising the spirits of the major-domo to an unusually pleasant pitch, which, however, was doomed to be speedily overclouded, for, as he turned into the forest shade, he suddenly encountered the bright blue eyes and inscrutable smile of Franco, the peasant, busily engaged in chopping wood by the roadside. Neither of the men spoke, but the memory of that smile and glance lay with no light burden on the steward's heart throughout that fair October day.

CHAPTER XIII

DURING these sunny days of Abra's life it would have been impossible to have made her believe that the hero, enshrined within the sanctity of her thoughts, and on whom she lavished the love of her pure, deep nature, was not Phaco Varinella, but a being of her own creation. But so it was ; and yet, although hers was the age and nature for idealising, the flowery crowns woven by her imagination were surpassed by the high Christian attainments she had learnt to revere in her parents, and with which she decorated her idol, until she believed his word to be as immaculate as her father's, and his tenderness as disinterested as her mother's. So ignorant was the young girl of the ways of the world that she had never believed, even for one passing moment, that Phaco had ever belonged to the Arian heretics, whom she had been trained to regard with such horror and detestation. Perchance, had she been allowed to see more of him than during the very brief and occasional visits her mother permitted, her love and admiration for her hero might have been of a less blinded nature, and her conception of his character less unreal. Deeply, however, as Abra loved and

revered the gifted young nobleman, unknown to herself she loved "truth and honour more," and were any extraneous circumstance ever to occur, by which her eyes should be opened to see Phaco in his true character, the result could only be an entire shipwreck of her earthly happiness; and little did the fond mother imagine, as she rejoiced in the returning health and buoyancy of spirit of her beloved child, how frail was the bark to which had been committed the wealth of that loving, girlish heart.

On a somewhat dreary morning in November, about a month after the departure of Balbus, one of the rare occasions of Phaco's visits occurred. Abra was sitting by her mother's side, listening with flushing cheek and almost bated breath to the young nobleman's brilliant and graphic description of one of those famous Olympic games he had witnessed during his late sojourn in Rome. Even Rhoda was sufficiently carried away by the stirring narration to let her busy hands rest idly on the needlework over which she had been bending.

At that instant, however, Cassius hurried into the room, pale and horror-stricken.

"My noble mistress," he said, in a low and trembling voice, as he advanced towards her, "may I humbly crave speech of thee for a few moments in private."

"Certainly thou mayest," she answered pleasantly. "Phaco," she said, turning to her guest, "I do not

think I need crave thy pardon for thus leaving thee to my daughter's entertainment. I do not suppose there is any very serious reason," she continued, in a lower voice, "for this hasty summons; it doth not require much to alarm my worthy Cassius, he possesseth not the calm bearing of thy worthy Balbus."

"Phaco, were there many noble ladies gathered to watch these fair sports?" asked Abra, as Rhoda left the apartment.

"There were many hundreds," the young man answered, "and among them the fairest and choicest stars the ancient city could produce. But I know a face and form," he continued, with a gaze of ardent admiration into the beautiful countenance before him, "that would have outshone them all."

"If thou meanest thy Abra," the girl answered with a smile and blush, "what place, thinkest thou, could a poor little country maid hold amidst such grandeur."

"Abra," exclaimed the young man, springing to his feet, "the time shall come, my beloved, when the world shall acknowledge thy beauty, and thou shalt shine, by thy husband's side, the fairest gem in Cæsar's Court."

"Fie, Phaco," answered the girl, drawing away the hand he endeavoured to seize. "Hast thou not promised my mother that her little Abra shall never leave her?"

"I meant but for a brief sojourn, my beloved," replied Phaco, "in the city of the great Augustus."

"Nay, Phaco," she exclaimed almost passionately, "name not to me the tyrant who hath driven my beloved father forth out a lonely and dreary exile; what to the daughter of the banished Hilary are the smiles and favours of Cæsar's Court. Believe me," she continued more gently, and with a shy but loving glance into the young nobleman's face, "I care not for the admiration of others so that I be esteemed fair in thine eyes and in those I love—nay, my Phaco, let us rather go forth hand in hand to do our duty, and to fulfil the station to which God hath called us here in our own fair neighbourhood, and leave to the world its adulations and flatteries, so that thou and I together earn the smile and the approval of our heavenly Lord."

Abra had arisen to her feet, and as she spoke she unconsciously raised one hand to Heaven, while the light of a high and holy purpose beamed from her beautiful eyes. For the moment, she appeared like some lovely inspired prophetess, and beneath her spell the lingering remains of all that was once noble in Phaco's nature asserted their long-lost dominion in his heart.

"Speak on, my beloved," he said, in a voice as fervent as her own, "lead me where thou wilt, mould me to thy own sweet will, if only I may learn at last to drink from the pure chalice of thy words

something of thy spirit's truth and beauty they enshrine."

He could say no more, for at that instant Rhoda re-entered the apartment, her face pale, and even more horror-stricken than the steward's had been but a few minutes before.

"My beloved Phaco," she said, laying her hand on his arm, and speaking with the greatest possible tenderness, "I bring thee sad and awful news. Abra, my precious child, it pains me sorely to have to sadden thy young heart with the same."

Abra stole to her mother's side, and Phaco regarded her in silence, and with his usually unmoved expression.

"Balbus hath been robbed and foully murdered."

A feeling almost of relief that the painful tidings referred to no one more beloved than Balbus stole over Abra's features, but Phaco sprang forward like a man shot through the heart.

"Robbed, murdered," he repeated, with ashen lips and shaking limbs; "not Balbus! O Rhoda! say it is not Balbus of whom thou speakest!"

"It is indeed," she answered, unable to disguise her astonishment at the effect of her communication. "If I had known how this would have pained thee, Phaco, I——"

"Hush, hush," the young man answered with a strong effort at self-control, "thou knowest naught—or how necessary—that is, how dear—was my poor slain servitor to my happiness and welfare," and then

turning to Abra, without a moment's pause for thought, he said, almost in his own natural tone: "My sweet one, I must hasten from thy presence in order at once to track these wicked murderers, and to bring them to the punishment they deserve."

Abra's eyes filled with tears. "So soon, Phaco," she said softly, "but thou wilt hasten back to thy little Abra, for the time will seem lonely without thee."

"I will not tarry one moment longer from the light of my soul than can be avoided. Abra, wilt thou give me one promise ere I leave thee?"

She smiled an assent through her tears.

"Whatever may chance, wilt thou never doubt my love for thee?"

"Never, Phaco."

The young nobleman bent his head, and for a moment his lips rested lightly upon Abra's fair upturned brow, as he softly breathed the word "Remember." The next, with a hurried bow to Rhoda, he had hastened from the apartment; and before nightfall was on his journey, but whither bound no one knew.

The relative causes of trouble are often forgotten in the individual trials and misfortunes of life, and a passing discomfort of to-day, may as effectually overcloud the peace and happiness of a household, as some overwhelming misfortune on the morrow.

While Abra was weeping in secret over the unexpected departure of her lover, and her mother and

Claudiola were lamenting the sudden and awful death of the major-domo, the family of Franco were thrown into a state of distress and perturbation at the loss of their bullock, who had broken his tether, and had wandered away at his own sweet will in search of more desirable pasturage ; and the knowledge of deeper sorrow elsewhere, would not have lightened the distress of the worthy peasant as he trudged forth through the mire of a damp, drizzling, November afternoon in search of his recreant beast, which it had exhausted the honest savings of years to purchase. He wandered on through the adjacent fields (as devoid of hedgerows as are the meadows of France at the present day), without finding any trace of the bovine hoofs of the lost animal, and at length entered the forest, now almost bare of foliage. He had not heard of the recent discovery of the corpse of the murdered steward, or perhaps might not have chosen that especial part of the forest in the gathering dusk of the evening, where he had last beheld his bulky form in the full tide of health and strength ; but as it was, he trudged aimlessly along in the very footsteps of the slain man, until, wearied with his fruitless search, he threw himself down upon some dry leaves, protected from the rain by the magnificent branches of a cedar tree. As he did so, his eye fell upon a packet, lying half hidden among the leaves, which to his astonishment he found, upon examination, to be addressed to Saturninus, the

Bishop of Arles. He turned it over and over, and in the strength of his freshly acquired knowledge of reading, endeavoured to decipher the contents.

The letter, for such it evidently was, had been torn open by ruthless hands, and had been probably cast away by the same as worthless. But was it worthless? In the fading light, the peasant had only succeeded in spelling out the two lines which headed the missive, but these were sufficient to send the blood bounding through his pulses, as his eye rested on the superscription:—

“To the most noble Saturninus, Bishop of Arles,—
“Phaco Varinella, greeting,—”

At this moment the sound of horses' hoofs rang, clear and distinct, on the forest pathway, and Franco, thrusting the letter into his pouch, sprang rapidly forward to discover who the rider might be. Great indeed was the worthy peasant's delight and astonishment as the magnificent form of the Roman centurion Rufus, followed by two soldiers of his guard, rode into sight.

He reined in his steed at the sight of the worthy peasant.

“Well met, my friend,” he said. “I see by thy colours thou art a retainer of the absent Lord Hilary. What news awaits me in his mansion yonder. Is the Lady Rhoda well?”

"Well indeed, most noble sir," answered the peasant.

"And the youthful Lady Abra, the report of whose charms have reached the capitals?"

"Yes, she is also well, and, I suppose, happy, since she and her neighbour, the Lord Phaco Varinella, have but recently plighted their troth one to another."

"What!" exclaimed the centurion, with a start so violent that his horse almost reared in alarm. "The Bishop Hilary's daughter betrothed to the Lord Phaco? Impossible! Were thy countenance a less honest one, my friend, I should say thou wert lying."

"Saving thy presence, most noble sir," answered Franco, "I would that I were."

"I see well, my worthy man, the news is no sweeter in thine ears than it is in mine. Fare thee well, for an honest fellow; wouldst thou borrow a light for thy lantern from one of my men's?"

Franco had his own private reasons for gladly availing himself of the offer, and long after the sound of the horses' hoofs of the riders had died away in the distance, the peasant sat on his bank of leaves poring over the letter in his hand, until every word was at last laboriously, but successfully, spelled out by the light of his friendly lantern.

The shades of night had already fallen when he re-entered his cottage. The expression on his face, as he threw aside his damp outer garments, caused his wife to exclaim—

"Surely, my Franco, thou hast found the poor beast?"

"The poor beast," he repeated absently. "Oh—ay—no, I have not found him; but, wife," he said, seating himself by her side, and throwing his arm round her waist in an unusual demonstration of affection, "when the good Martin shall return from his father's sick-bed, what thinkest thou, shall thou and I acquaint him with our desire to be baptized?"

"Baptized, my Franco; what meanest thou?" exclaimed the wife, while an expression of joyful surprise lit up her homely features.

"Only, my girl," he answered quietly, "that certain prayers of thine have met with an answer. The union between yon black-hearted hawk and our own spotless dove can never be; and the God who deigns to hear the prayers of poor men and women like us, my Franca, is the God I have been longing for all my life."

CHAPTER XIV

THE delight with which Rhoda welcomed the arrival of her father's ancient friend was greatly enhanced when she learned that the purport of the centurion's visit was to acquaint her with all that had befallen her beloved husband since his arrival at Biterra, for not only had he, with his men, been on guard during the proceedings of the Council, but they had also formed the military escort, appointed to convey the two exiled bishops to their subsequent destination in Phrygia.

Abra, who retained a lively and affectionate memory of her parents' esteemed friend, participated equally in her mother's joy at his unexpected presence, and in the tidings which he bore, and so eagerly did mother and daughter avail themselves of so delightful an opportunity of learning the particulars of the events which had befallen the beloved Hilary, that ere Rufus had been many hours under their roof, they were acquainted with all the information their distinguished guest was able to impart.

So keen, indeed, was the young girl's interest in every detail concerning the fate of her all but idolised father, that she committed to writing a great portion

of the facts thus imparted, ostensibly for the future benefit of the Lady Claudiola, but, as her mother shrewdly guessed, in reality for that of her son.

"How imposing must the spectacle of such a gathering have been," remarked Rhoda, as the trio gathered, on the second morning following the arrival of Rufus, to discuss still further the all-absorbing topic, "with the enthroned Augustus himself as president."

"It was, I almost think, one of the grandest sights I have ever seen, and I have witnessed very many during my military sojourn in the capitals," was the centurion's answer. "My little Abra, shall I endeavour to describe to thee the mighty Cæsar's attire?"

"I pray thee indeed to do so, noble Rufus," the girl answered with sparkling eyes.

"His robe was of dazzling whiteness,¹ with one large square exquisitely embroidered across the knee, and covering the whole of his majestic form, only leaving the right arm, wearing a heavy golden bracelet and checkered ornament extending from wrist to elbow, exposed; the upper portion of his garment, which formed the toga, was fastened with a brooch on the right shoulder, containing one almost priceless gem and many pendants. His crown was tiara-shaped, studded with lustrous jewels, and terminating in two enormous ear-rings of great magnifi-

¹ See Appendix, 19.

cence, and the hand which held his golden sceptre was adorned with rings, set with precious stones almost rivalling those which adorned his tiara."

"I beseech thee to continue, Rufus," said Rhoda, as the centurion paused in his description. "Tell us further of the spectacle which met my husband's eyes as he stood in his lonely championship to defend the truth so dear to his heart."

"The throne was supported on either side by a glittering throng of Arian bishops and noblemen, the former arrayed in episcopal robes of great magnificence, forming a sharp contrast to the simple pastoral attire of most of the orthodox Catholic¹ clergymen, more especially among those of the Gaulois Churches, and of my own Novatianist brethren; but methought, Rhoda, as my gaze wandered around that vast assembly," continued the centurion, affectionately laying his hand upon the lady's shoulder, "that thy husband, in the heavenly calm of his countenance, and the gentle dignity of his bearing, surpassed them all."

The happy tears gathered in the wife's eyes, and a sob escaped Abra's full heart.

"I acquainted thee," continued the noble soldier, tenderly stroking the girl's beautiful locks, as she nestled at his feet, "with thy husband's defence of the doctrine of the Divine nature of the second glorious Person of the Blessed Trinity. But I do

¹ See Appendix, 20.

not think, if I remember aright, that I have as yet informed thee of his words touching the inspiration of Holy Scripture."

"Wilt thou do so now, most esteemed Rufus, if such have not already perished from thy memory?"

"Nay, I have committed them to a surer guardianship than that of my own busy thoughts," answered the centurion with a smile, as he drew a small scroll from the folds of his toga; "I have written them herein." And he accordingly read as follows:—

"The Word of God contains all that the soul needs for its spiritual nourishment.¹ It is both the lamp and the light; and this light of God² must be applied to every action of our life.³ It is, moreover, adapted⁴ to our intelligence, and contains nothing unworthy of the majesty of God. How reverently, therefore, ought it to be preached and heard, and what holy fear should accompany its meditation,⁵ since God manifests the knowledge of Himself through the Scriptures, and it is that word of God which has instructed all those who have here already entered into life. Therefore I declare that whoever shall add anything *to* the teaching, or shall deduct anything *from* the teaching of Holy Scripture,⁶ let him be anathema; and by this term, Holy Scripture, is implied the Old and New Testament, and regarding the Scriptures which compose the former,

¹ St. Hil., *Pict. Epis., Opera*, Dom Coustant, 246.

² *Ibid.* 278.

³ *Ibid.* 277.

⁴ *Ibid.* 226.

⁵ *Ibid.* 275.

⁶ *Ibid.*

and which are to be received as the Word of God, are the following :—

“ ‘¹ The five books of Moses, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, the twelve minor prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah and his Lamentations and letters, Ezekiel, Daniel, Job, Esther. All others beyond these inspired writings are to be considered doubtful, even including the books of Judith and Tobit.’

“ Our godly Hilary,” continued the centurion, as he replaced the scroll, “concluded his defence of the veracity of the Word of God by an almost tender appeal to his imperial auditor not to seek to know the truth from the lips of men,² even though those men should be ordained bishops, but by the words given by God Himself ; and so potent was the effect of that appeal that it appeared to me, and to many others present likewise, that the haughty countenance of Cæsar blanched at his words, even as Felix trembled before those of the blessed Paul ; and it is my own firm conviction, that had it not been for certain evil advisers (not to be found among the episcopate only) that Hilary would have been released from the Council, and would have been restored to his family and flock. But although these same evil advisers did prevail, and the cruel sentence of banishment was ultimately given, yet was it accompanied

¹ St. Hil., *Pict. Epis., Opera*, Dom Coustant, 102. ² See Appendix, 21.

by a stifled murmur of indignant protest, and me-thought that even the voice of the imperial minion trembled as he pronounced the doom."

"And my beloved husband," sobbed Rhoda, "how did he support so wicked a verdict?"

"With the same holy fortitude that had upheld him throughout. The only calm man amidst all that perturbed and agitated throng was the Bishop of Poitiers. And, Rhoda, it was so to the end, during all the weariness, discomfort, and danger of that long and toilsome journey, concerning which I have already given thee so many particulars, when even the courage and strength of my brave soldiers seemed strained to their utmost tension, it was their revered prisoner who upheld and cheered the men's drooping spirits. And often, I believe, would his broken-hearted companion in exile, his beloved Rhodanus, have fallen into despair, had it not been for Hilary's prompt succour and loving words of cheer. As for me, Rufus the centurion will ever hold that terrible, toilsome journey into Phrygia as the richest memory and the most blessed experience of his life."

He paused and remained for some moments buried in deep and solemn thought, until Abra asked timidly—

"But, honoured sir, did not the kindness of your welcome, concerning which thou didst inform us yesterday, awaiting the conclusion of so terrible a journey, in some slight way atone for its miseries?"

"Thou art indeed right, my little Abra. All the clergy, attended by many members of their flock, came forth a distance of many miles to meet us and to conduct us to our destination,¹ and their numbers greatly astonished us. I was especially refreshed by the greeting of the bishop, and several of his flock, of my Novatianist brethren; as I have already informed thee, the house, to which they led the exiled bishops, is a commodious one, and with no lack of domestic slaves to minister to their comfort. The country itself, as I have also before stated, is very lovely, abounding in lakes, mountains, and rivers. But I fear greatly, that the gentle Rhodanus did not long live to enjoy so fair a haven of rest after all his weary wanderings; his health and spirit alike seemed broken, and I doubt not but that, long ere now, the loss of his beloved friend and companion hath been added to the heavy burden of sorrow, thy husband, my Rhoda, hath been called upon to endure."

"But oh!" sobbed Abra, "why—why did God, if He is all love, why did He let so much suffering fall upon so holy, so gentle a heart as my beloved father's?"

"Fie, my child," answered the centurion gently, and with a tender gaze into the girl's flushed and tear-stained countenance; "remember those blessed words I repeated to thee but yesternight, the last

¹ See Appendix, 22.

those revered lips charged me to deliver to his family and flock : 'All things work together for good to them who love God.' "

Although somewhat comforted by so sweet a message, the agitation of the young girl at the contemplation of her father's suffering was so great that, in order to divert her mind, Rhoda desired her to bid Alva attend her on a visit to Claudiola, to inform their beloved friend of the particulars they had learned so lately, concerning the absent bishop, from the lips of the esteemed Rufus.

As Abra accordingly left the apartment, the centurion advanced towards Rhoda, and laying his hand impressively upon her shoulder, said, in the fatherly manner he so often adopted towards the daughter of his departed friend—

"Rhoda, who thinkest thou was among the noblemen who voted for the banishment of thy husband?"

"Nay, how can I tell thee, Rufus? Only one more of those my foes for whose salvation I have lately learnt to plead."

"By all means would I advise thee to continue so scriptural and laudable a practice, only take heed when next thou prayest for thy enemies that thou omittest not to include the name of Phaco Varinella."

"Phaco Varinella! Rufus, what meanest thou?"

"That his vote helped to condemn thy husband."

"I—I did not know he was present at the Council. Nay, I feel assured he informed me he was at Lyons

during the time of the Emperor's visit to Biterra. O Rufus ! art thou assured it was he ? Think how many years have passed since you last met—is it not possible that thou wert mistaken ? ”

Her voice had become almost pitiful in its tone of entreaty.

“ I am fully convinced of what I am saying, Rhoda. I was, strange to say, standing by Phaco's side when the sentence was announced, and never shall I forget the haughty gleam of triumph from those dark, evil eyes.”

She covered her face and groaned aloud. But the centurion, who had arisen and was pacing the room, hardly seemed to heed her distress, so deeply did he appear to be buried in thought.

At length he paused and stood before her. “ Rhoda,” he said sternly, “ tell me, is it true that during thy lord's absence, and so soon after his departure, thou hast allowed thine extremely youthful daughter to plight her troth to this man ? ”

The reproach conveyed in his look and tone, even more than by his words, smote keenly upon her gentle heart, and with much agitation she poured into his ears, as he once more seated himself by her side, the story of the last few months, and while the tears rolled down her pale cheeks, and sobs shook her voice, confided to him all the reasons which together had united in her allowing Phaco to declare his love.

The centurion listened in silence, and when the lady concluded, asked, with but little change from his former tone—

“And where abideth this paragon of devotion, whose transitions from one creed to another are of such astounding velocity that three months after he hath assisted in condemning an innocent man to a cruel banishment on account of his religious convictions, he straightway espouseth the same, and sueth for the hand of the daughter of the exiled bishop, who chanceth to be the fairest maid in Christendom.”

“Nay, my beloved Rufus, misjudge not the young man thus wrongfully ; he hath, in reality, embraced the pure doctrine of the Catholic Church.”

“Ay, and with as sincere a motive as actuated him formerly in adopting the tenets of the Arians, which offered the only sure road to the imperial favour. But thou hast not yet answered my question concerning this renowned specimen of religious candour, whom I left an Arian at Biterra, and find a Catholic at Poitiers. Where tarries he ?”

“He has gone to discover the men who have lately murdered his beloved steward, the worthy Balbus, and to bring them to justice.”

“When did this murder occur ?”

“They tell me that, from the decomposed state in which the body was found, the poor man must have been slain but shortly after he departed on his master’s errand.”

"What errand was that?"

"To ensure the safety of Abra's letter to her father, soliciting his consent to their union."

Rufus, without a word, placed an open, weather-stained packet in Rhoda's hand.

"What meaneth this?" cried the lady, with a bewildered glance from the torn and mud-soiled document to her friend's face.

"Dost thou recognise the handwriting that lies before thee?"

"Surely," answered the lady, in increased astonishment, "this must be—nay, it is—Rufus, this letter is from Phaco to the Bishop Saturninus."

"It is; and I leave thee," replied the centurion, "to consider the perusal of the same in solitude and at thy leisure."

"But, Rufus, answer me one question ere thou goest. How did this missive come into thy possession?"

"It was picked up by thy retainer, Franco, not far from the spot where the murdered body of the poor wretch, Balbus, was discovered, and was handed to me by the worthy peasant at a late hour last night. Read it, Rhoda, and ere thou shalt have concluded its cursed contents, thou wilt no longer deem that I condemn Phaco, or censure thee, without cause."

CHAPTER XVI

A FIERCE wintry storm was howling over the landscape, cracking and tearing huge limbs from the forest trees, and driving man and beast alike before it in its wild fury.

Abra was gazing sadly out from her casement at the ruined orange-grove, now a tangled, shuddering heap of twisted stems and dry interlacing branches, and was pensively contemplating the question, whether the summer when it came would be able to restore it to its former loveliness.

More than a week had passed since Phaco's departure, and in spite of the pleasure and interest which the centurion's visit had brought with it, the young girl's heart felt sad and depressed, as her eyes rested on the débris of the luxuriant summer foliage torn ruthlessly from its hold, and tossing helplessly about on the pitiless bosom of the tempest.

"How I wish it were always summer," mused the melancholy maid, as at that moment a white dove, driven from its shelter by the blast, fluttered its wings in terror across the casement; "always summer, always sunshine, always flowers. Why

should storms blow and tempests arise?" Unconsciously to herself she had given audible expression to her thoughts, and started as a gentle voice said in her ear: "Storm and wind fulfilling His will."

"O Alva!" she exclaimed, "I did not perceive thy entrance. Yes, I know I am wrong, but look at our sweet, fair garden—is it not a sad, sad wreck? Thinkest thou those flowers, we tended so carefully last summer, will ever bloom again?"

"Most assuredly will they, in the Lord's good time, sweet mistress. But I am charged with thy mother's summons to thee to join her and the Lady Claudiola!"

"The Lady Claudiola! how could she venture out in such a storm?"

The faithful nurse turned away her face. "She arrived in her litter," was the low answer.

"But even so—surely there must have been some urgent reason? Alva, why art thou so grave? What has chanced? I implore thee, nay, I command thee, to tell me instantly."

"That I may not do, my beloved child. But tarry not, I entreat thee; thou wilt learn all that it will be judged well for thee to know within yonder parlour."

With an undefined sense of bewilderment and dread, Abra obeyed, but as she at length entered the chamber indicated, a bounding sense of delight

swept all other emotions from her heart, for the first object on which her eyes rested was the handsome form of Phaco, leaning, in an attitude of haughty indifference, against the casement.

As his gaze met hers, however, a change passed for an instant over his countenance, and that momentary regard, at once passionate, vindictive, entreating, seemed to pierce the very depths of her soul. Gradually she became conscious, however, of the presence of others; Claudiola sat by her mother's side, and opposite them, his handsome features wearing an expression of military sternness, stood the Roman centurion.

As the bewildered girl's glance finally turned towards her mother, Rhoda held out her arms, and Abra gladly nestled by her side.

"My little Abra," said Rufus, turning towards her and speaking in a voice of great tenderness, while the rigidity of his features perceptibly softened, "eight years ago I held thee in these arms and prayed that the Heavenly Shepherd would make thee one of His own for ever. Tell me, my little one, is this the prayer of thine own heart likewise?"

The young girl raised her pure, limpid eyes to his. "Most assuredly it is," she answered simply. "And my one desire is, that such a petition may meet with my gracious Lord's fulfilment."

As the earnest, soft tones of the girlish voice

floated through the room, Phaco turned abruptly towards the window, while Rufus continued—

“Then, my child, such being the heavenly condition of thy soul, thou art prepared at all risks to obey His commands, and to yield thy will to His.”

“What meanest thou, noble sir?” Abra answered, with a slight quiver of her beautiful lips.

“What portion hath Christ with Belial, or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?”

The girl turned and clung convulsively to her mother. “Mother—mother,” she cried, regarding her with wild, dazed eyes, “what meaneth this—‘Belial’—‘an infidel’—to what, or to whom, does the noble Rufus refer?”

“To the Lord Phaco Varinella,” exclaimed the centurion, as he strode to the nobleman’s side.

“My lord, I charge thee with lying and perjury, and herein lieth my warrant for the same,” he added, thrusting his own epistle to Saturninus into his hand.

With a cry, which none who heard it were ever to forget, Abra sprang to her feet, and would have flown to Phaco’s side, had not her mother’s hand restrained her.

“Oh, my son, my son,” cried Claudiola, advancing with outstretched hands towards him, “tell him—tell yon dastardly soldier that he lies, foully, shamefully lies.”

But Phaco, tearing the letter into fragments, flung them beneath his feet, and waving his mother im-

periously aside, stepped forward and confronted Abra and her mother, with bloodless lips and shining eyes.

"Abra," he said, in a strange, unnatural voice, "raise thine eyes—look upon me—listen! *Rufus does not lie*. I have lied—I have dissembled—I have perjured my soul—ay, and would perjure it again, a thousand times—for thee. Nay, I will forestall all that yonder centurion is prepared to show. I voted for thy father's exile in order that I might win thee in his absence. I professed to be of thine own saintly persuasion (although albeit all creeds are alike worthless in my eyes) to gain thy mother's consent to tell thee of my deathless love. I wrote yon letter to Saturninus, urging him to prevent thy letter, soliciting thy father's consent to our betrothal, from reaching its destination, because I knew that that consent would never be given. Thus do I reveal myself to thine eyes, and so farewell. Hate Phaco henceforth with all the strength of thy pure, deep nature, loathe the very steps his false feet have trodden, spurn his gifts from thee as thou wouldst recoil from the contagion of leprosy, yet never canst thou tear from thy memory the fact that I love thee, and will love thee for ever. Farewell, Abra of Poitiers, and farewell my happiness here and my hopes of heaven hereafter."

He seized the hand that Abra, either consciously or unconsciously, extended to him, and held it for one

moment passionately to his lips, then almost flinging it from him, strode from the apartment.

Five minutes later, as Franco, the peasant, was tightening the fastenings of his cottage as a greater protection against the fury of the elements, the rapid sound of a horse's hoofs drew him to the doorway, and as the reckless rider dashed past him through the boom of the tempest and against the very teeth of the driving sleet, he recognised the haughty bearing of Phaco Varinella.

By midnight the storm had abated, and only the fitful sobbing of the forest trees and the roar of the cataracts broke the stillness of the starless night. As the watchman trudged onward through the miry streets chanting the hour of twelve, a cry arose, piercing the silence in which the stately mansion of the absent bishop lay wrapt. And before the pale wintry dawn had chased away the shadows of that night of suffering and alarm, posts had ridden forth in all directions in search of medical aid, and the tidings had passed from lip to lip that Abra of Poitiers had been stricken with mortal illness.

Franco was the first to bring the mournful tidings to his wife, accompanied with an urgent entreaty, from the agonised Rhoda, to the faithful foster-mother of her child to come to her at once.

"Nay, nay, fret not so wildly, my girl," he said, as he piloted Franca's footsteps through the dark, muddy byways, and drawing his own hand across his

eyes as he spoke, "'twere better so, even should we ne'er behold her sweet face again. Whatever comes thou wilt never blame thy husband that he gave yon cursed letter to the brave and noble Rufus, wilt thou, my Franca?"

"Nay, nay, my man, for thou art always right; but oh, it will be hard to lose my darling babe."

"Not so hard," rejoined her husband, manfully repressing a sob, and thankful for the darkness which hid his falling tears from the eyes of his dutiful spouse, "not so hard as to live to see her the bride of yon black-hearted, false lord."

.

But Abra did not die; for many weeks the stricken girl hovered between life and death, but youth, combined with the devotion and care of mother and attendants, prevailed; and yet so striking was the change in her appearance, when first she emerged from her deadly sickness, that it seemed almost impossible to believe that the stricken, emaciated girl, with her white cheeks and shorn locks, was the same maiden, the report of whose dazzling beauty had even penetrated the charmed circle of the Court of Byzantium. But as the days passed on, and the healthy young blood once more coursed through her veins, restoring lost tissue and reanimating the frame, gradually the lines of beauty were once more replaced; silky curls clustered round the temples and peeped from behind the delicate ears, the soft colour

returned to cheek and lip, and a light to the beautiful eyes, and Abra of Poictiers finally arose from her bed of illness more lovely than ever.

But a change, far more painful to the mother's heart than any affecting her outward appearance would have been, seemed to have passed over her child's inner nature. In the place of the former natural buoyancy of spirit, she manifested a cold, impassive reserve, an habitual, pensive silence, which defied every loving attempt on her part to penetrate or disarm.

Except in the ravings of delirium, Phaco's name had never passed her lips since that awful hour in which he had bidden her farewell ; but her mother knew her thoughts were continually with him, and at times a feeling, almost of impatience, possessed her gentle heart, that one so high-souled as Abra could entertain any lingering affection for such a character as Phaco's had been proved in reality to be.

During Abra's sickness, Rufus had been recalled to Rome and Martin had returned from Tours, but the respective communication of these events awakened no interest in the young convalescent ; she received the former in perfect silence, the latter with languid indifference.

This barrier of reserve, which entirely separated her child's heart from the mother who had previously shared her almost every thought, painful as it was in

itself, was acutely increased by the fact that Claudiola seemed gradually to be usurping her own place in Abra's confidence. The daily visits of Phaco's mother seemed the only events which had power to raise the young girl from the silent, brooding melancholy in which she had sunk, and, in short, the Christian matron, who had hitherto been able to trace the Father's loving will or permission in each one of the heavy trials through which she had been called upon to endure, in this apparent alienation of her daughter's regard and confidence, was passing through the supreme sorrow of her life.

One exquisite morning in early spring, as she entered her child's chamber with a bunch of narcissus she had gathered for her in her hand, the extreme pallor of her mother's cheek and the almost haggard expression of her features, for once, attracted Abra's attention, and caused her to exclaim, with some approach to her former affectionate solicitude of manner—

“Mother, thou art ruining thine own health in attending to that of thine ungrateful, thine utterly unworthy daughter. O mother, I beseech thee to take an airing in thy litter ; the sunshine will revive thee, and thou needest not to fear at leaving me to Alva's faithful care.”

Her child's tone was so pleading, and betokened such a reviving interest in her welfare, that Rhoda promised to yield to her wishes, and as she departed

to give the necessary orders, her heart felt lighter than it had felt for many days. But her emotion of pleasure would have been speedily changed to one of the tenderest commiseration, could she have witnessed the paroxysm of tears which convulsed the young, fragile frame so soon as she had found herself alone.

The outburst had spent itself, and an occasional sob alone remained to tell of this bitter weeping, when a gentle hand was laid upon the girl's burning temples, and Alva's voice sounded softly in her ears.

"My beloved one, thy father's esteemed friend, Martin, hath bidden me to tell thee that he craves speech on a matter that greatly concerneth thee," and before Abra could reply, the nurse had quitted the room, and Martin himself stood before her couch.

"Martin!" she exclaimed, indignantly turning away her face to hide the traces of her tears, but not before she had caught a glimpse of the joy that was beaming from his every feature—"what means this——"

"Ay, thou shalt soon know, my little sister. Tell me, Abra, what could give thee the greatest joy at this moment to receive?"

The girl turned towards him quickly: "I know of nought that hath power to pleasure me—unless it was that which is impossible."

"Name this impossible boon for which thou so craveth."

“A word from my father.”

Silently, but with a smile of unspeakable sweetness, Martin placed a sealed packet in her hand, and ere she could raise her eyes, glowing with a sudden joy, to his, had disappeared.

Two hours later, when Rhoda again sought her daughter's side, she found her calmly sleeping, and although teardrops were still glistening on her long dark lashes, there was the old peaceful, girlish smile on her lips. One soft white hand still grasped her precious letter ; but so deep was her childish slumber, that the mother ventured to imprint a kiss on the girl's forehead, and even to extract the packet from her fingers, without awakening her, and seating herself by the side of the fair young sleeper, she read as follows :—

“To my tenderly beloved and longed-for daughter,
Abra, Hilary sendeth greeting in the Lord.

“I have received thy letter, in which I learn how thou longest for thy father, and well can I understand how sad my absence must be to thee ; but I hasten to show thee, my child, that, far from my absence being a cruel separation, it is fraught with blessings to thee and enables me to serve thy interests. Remember, my beloved one, that thy father's one wish for thee hast ever been that thy soul should always be adorned with health, truth, and beauty. My child, I have met with One Who is of

such surpassing heavenly beauty that none dare look upon Him, and Who possesseth a pearl called Faith and a garment called Salvation, the which whosoever receive shall be blessed above all words. When I saw Him, I fell prostrate before His face, but He lovingly bade me tell Him all my desire ; then, with many tears, I told Him how I loved my daughter, and how I longed for her to possess the Pearl and the garment that He alone can bestow, and of which I had heard such glorious things spoken. Then this glorious One bade His servants bring forth the best robe and this beautiful Pearl—and they did so. First they showed to me the garment—how can I describe it ? Before its radiant whiteness snow would look black, and before its radiance gold would become as dross. Then the servants showed me the Pearl—but so lustrous was it that I felt unable to support such glory ; for its colour was so dazzling that no eye can look upon it, and the fairest things on earth and the sky and the sea are unable to be compared with it. And when this gracious One saw me thus fallen, He told me that this garment was not only fair to see but that it can never fade or become moth-eaten or worn out ; also that the Pearl will preserve the one who possesseth it from injury and destruction. And when I heard this, my beloved child, I implored this gracious One that He would vouchsafe that my beloved child might wear this garment, and be adorned with this Pearl. He answered me, He

would grant my request on one condition, and that is : if thou hast this garment and this Pearl thou must give up all desire for the vain garments and jewels of this life, for His things can never mingle with the things belonging to this world. Therefore, my beloved daughter, I await thine answer. Let me know thy mind in the matter, and if thou desirest to renounce the vanities of this life in order to possess this beautiful pearl of Faith and garment of Salvation, tell me so thyself and I will tell thee the name of this Heavenly One and Who He is. I enclose thee a morning and evening hymn. If thou canst not understand this letter, ask thy mother to help thee ; and now may God bless my beloved daughter through time and through eternity."

CHAPTER XVI

MARTIN had returned from Tours a changed man. Whether so pleasant a transformation from his former gloomy sternness to his present gentle gravity of demeanour was due either to the circumstance of his father's complete restoration to health or to Phaco's absence, Rhoda was unable to decide, but the effect of such a metamorphosis was so agreeable, that without troubling to investigate the cause, she contented herself with thankfully and unquestioningly accepting this return to the happy mutual relations, which had existed between herself and her husband's dearest friend, during the earlier days of the bishop's departure.

The fact, which Alva had communicated to her, that Martin had, himself, brought that precious letter to Abra which now lay beside her, sprinkled with her own and her child's tears, foreboded a healthier condition in his regard for her daughter than Rhoda, at one time, had dared to anticipate, and brought a feeling of intense relief to her heavily-burdened heart. She had partly risen with the intention of thanking him for this act of courtesy to her child, when Abra's softly whispered

"Mother" caused her to turn her head. The girl had awakened.

"Mother, O mother," she cried, slipping from her couch, and throwing herself on her knees before the astonished Rhoda, while she flung her arms around her. "Oh, my beloved, gentle, beautiful mother," she sobbed, "say, canst thou ever forgive thy selfish, thy rebellious child!"

"Calm thee, my beloved," said Rhoda, raising the weeping Abra and folding her in her arms; "there, lay thy head upon thy mother's breast, and tell her all the sorrow of that sad little heart."

"The greatest of all," was the still tearful answer, "is that thy Abra has so undutifully and ungratefully requited the love of the tenderest, the most devoted mother, that ever daughter hast been blessed with."

Rhoda's only answer was a tender kiss on the beautiful, upturned brow, while a prayer of thanksgiving, beyond the power of words to utter, floated upward from her heart.

"And what hath caused thee this deep contrition, my Abra?" she said at length.

"These precious words from my father," she said, clasping his letter to her bosom as she spoke; "my mother, hast thou read what is writ herein?"

"I have, my child."

"Mother, I know full well who is that Shining One of Whom my father speakest such brave things.

He is the Heavenly Bridegroom. Wilt thou give me thy sanction to write to my father presently ? ”

“ What is it that thou desirest to say to him, my Abra ? ”

“ I desire to tell him that his little Abra turneth from all other, and gives herself wholly unto that Heavenly Bridegroom for ever, and that, moreover, she desireth to be clothed with His garment of salvation, and to be adorned with His pearl, and esteemeth all the gems and glories of earth but poor dross, so that she may win and wear the same.”

“ And is this thine own unaided resolve, my child ? ” said the mother, regarding the girl with an expression of solemn awe.

“ Yea, mother, for before I slept I sought my precious scroll which containeth the inspired words of the blessed Paul to the ancient Church of Corinth, and the foremost words I read therein, were these :—

“ ‘ This is the difference between a wife and a virgin, she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. She that is unmarried careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit ’—and, mother,” continued the girl, nestling closer in her embrace, “ as I read those words, all that remained of my wicked longing for—for—Phaco passed for ever from my heart, and believe me, my beloved parent, were he to become a thousandfold nobler,

grander, than I once deemed him to be, even he could not draw my heart from this holy, blissful union with my Heavenly King."

Rhoda could only fold her daughter to her breast in silence, her emotion was far too powerful for words.

Abra gently broke from her mother's embrace, and took up a lyre which lay beside her. After striking a few sweet notes by way of prelude, her rich, clear, young voice broke forth into the following words of the beautiful morning hymn, enclosed in her father's letter, and which he had composed especially for his absent child :—

MORNING HYMN¹

S. HILARY

THE shadows of the night have vanished
Which held the captive day, once banished,
Now breaking loose from every chain
She doth unfold herself again.
The Giver of the light art Thou ;
Not like yon distant little star,
Which shines with light serene, afar,
Of coming day the harbinger ;
But clearer than yon orb of light,
Than all the stars of Heaven more bright,
Illumining in every part
The hidden chambers of the heart,
Art Thou, true Day-star of the world,
Whose heavenly glories are unfurled
In all the grandeur of Thy might,
In all the splendour of Thy light.

¹ See Appendix, 23.

The Light, the Day, the Day-star, Thou ;
Arise, Thou source of things eternal,
Glory of the light paternal.
These bodies which our souls are wearing,
We yield, by grace, to Thine appearing ;
By the Spirit's fulness guide us,
Through whatever shade betide us,
Lest deceits in ambush hidden
Rise and conquer us unbidden.
When these scenes of life are ended,
With all their sins and sorrow blended,
We may arise and dwell with Thee
Throughout a blest Eternity.
Thy Holy Spirit strives within us
By His purity to win us ;
Driving out, in heavenly fashion,
Base desires and carnal passion,
Till our bodies shall become
Thy pure, consecrated home.
This is the hope of praying hearts,
This confidence our faith imparts,
To us, imprisoned in the night,
There still shall rise the morning light.

Glory to Thee, O Father Lord,
To Thee, the One begotten Word,
To Thee, blest Spirit, one in Three,
Now and evermore shall be.

AMEN.

Three years had passed away, and once more the summer shone in cloudless splendour on Hilary's stately mansion. Rhoda was standing where we first met her, by the margin of the fountain, but the white-winged doves (or their progeny) which had on that occasion alighted upon her, were now safely

congregating under the eaves of the house, looking down with no small astonishment on the unusual scene of excitement and stir below. For, on this occasion, their gentle mistress was not indulging in lonely reverie, but on the contrary was surrounded by the entire force of her household and retainers, all attired in festal array, and forming thereby a very bewilderment of glowing colours and shining beads.

Banners of every device were hanging in drooping folds in the fragrant stillness of the summer day, and eager, joyous voices mingled with the sweet (or discordant as the case might be) notes of various musical instruments sounding on all sides, while no words could approximately describe the intense delight which animated every countenance of that laughing, happy throng; if any circumstance could, however, have increased the universal manifestation of joy, it lay in that which hushed every voice, and withdrew every gaze, as Abra, supported by Martin, advanced from the entrance of the mansion to her mother's side.

The exquisite beauty of the maiden, which the intervening years had rather increased than diminished, was enhanced on the present occasion by the simplicity of her dress—a white garment edged with purple, denoting her rank as a nobly-born virgin. Alva had twined a spray of orange blossom among her lady's dark locks, and this fragrant flower was

her only ornament. With a glad smile on her beautiful, blushing face, Abra responded to the almost reverent greeting of her humble friends ; her arrival among them was followed by that of Claudiola, the lonely widow's present joy chasing away for the time the memory of her sorrows.

And what was this joy ? What meant that strange far-away look in Rhoda's dark eyes, and the deep flush on her cheek, and the tremulous smile on her lips ? What meant that sudden hush of the throng, followed by sobbing, swelling shouts of joy, as the sound of horses' hoofs were heard in the distance—and what their almost frantic rush forward, headed by Martin, and bearing the three ladies in their midst, as those sounds drew nearer ?

We bound forward, outstripping even the speed of Martin, only to pause in rapt awe, as we recognise that wearied, approaching traveller, for well we know of only one whose countenance could wear that look of holy calm in such a moment, of only one whose head would thus bend low in prayer as if seeking his Father's benediction before venturing to enter upon the joy awaiting him, of only one whose voice could rise in a burst of praise to his God, ere he shouted his response to the welcome of his flock.

Yes, in yon grey-headed exile, changed as he is by suffering and travel, we recognise the still noble form and heavenly face of Hilary, the Bishop of Poitiers.

CHAPTER XVIII

It would be impossible to translate into words the joy of Hilary's return. For many weeks subsequent to their beloved bishop's arrival, the affectionate and always demonstrative Pictavians testified their delight by every possible manifestation within their power. Huge bonfires flamed, night after night, from each adjacent hilltop ; processions of every kind poured through the streets of the town carrying floral devices in his honour ; serenading bands sang him to sleep at night with their wild, melodious strains, and saluted his waking hours, and when the Sabbath arrived, the Church of St. John was unable to hold the vast crowds that poured in, from every quarter, to hear his beloved voice again.

Amidst all this public rejoicing, however, the household of the bishop was not behindhand in the outward expression of delight with which they welcomed their lord's return. Even Martin seemed to forget his habitual gravity of demeanour, as he mingled with smiling face and cheery voice in the simple festivities of the occasion, while the unspeakable joy and thanksgiving that filled Rhoda's loving heart seemed to have restored to her the lost bloom and happiness of her youth.

Abra simply walked, or rather danced, on air ; every lingering trace of sadness had left her face, and her rippling, girlish laughter again sounded in the ears of those who loved her, as gaily as in the days of her happy childhood.

And yet, amidst all the joy, one little shadow had crept into the sunshine, unnoticed at first, but as the days passed on and it loomed larger and larger, more than one heart in that happy and united household perceived its presence, and shrank trembling before it. Among these was Martin. The token of that insidious disease which had borne so many of his younger brothers and sisters from his own home, was too sadly familiar with him not to see, in the flush on Abra's fair cheek, and the remarkable brilliance in her dark eyes, its premonitory signs. Whether the young ascetic shrank from this discovery in agony of spirit, or hailed it as a glorious release, who can say—perhaps both. The young girl's cloudless happiness in the return of her long-exiled father, her constant thought for the happiness of those around her, her loving ministrations to the sick and sorrowful among the stricken members of Hilary's flock, and her lively interest in every passing event—all combined in hiding from the loving hearts of her parents the fact that the beautiful young life, the sunshine of their home, was perceptibly fading before their eyes.

Hilary, after his return from exile, had decided

to carry out his former desire to reside in the very midst of his flock, and had already, in fact, prior to his departure, commenced to build a house¹ for himself and family within the ramparts of the town.

Abra took the greatest delight in watching the continued progress of this unostentatious mansion, and even mapped out the future appropriation of its various chambers.

"This will be thine own especial apartment, my father, will it not?" she said on one occasion when she had accompanied the bishop in his inspection of the now almost completed building, "and that fair chamber at the end of yon corridor will be a pleasant retreat for my beloved mother, and——"

"And where is my little Abra's own especial apartment?" asked the bishop, smiling down on the girl's animated face.

Abra started. The eager look faded, and an almost solemn, and yet wholly joyous expression, stole into the eyes raised to his.

"Not here, my father," she answered softly.

"Not here, my Abra? Where then?"

"Yonder, father." Abra raised her hand as she spoke to the cloudless sky, shining through the casement of the empty room in which they stood. "O my father, canst thou not perceive that the Heavenly Bridegroom hath already sent for thy little Abra, and soon, very soon, before this earthly home is prepared for thee and my mother—shall I have entered

¹ See Appendix, 24.

into the fair mansion above, to behold His fair face and to serve Him for ever ? ”

Hilary did not speak. That moment—as his eye rested on the child so dear to his heart, and read for the first time, in the transparency of her skin, the hectic flush on her cheek, the brilliancy of her eyes, the rapid breathing of the parted lips, the doom of her fair earthly life—was his Gethsemane.

“ Lord,” he cried, raising his hands and eyes to heaven, while the first tears Abra had ever seen upon his face rolled down his cheeks, white and drawn with the inward agony of his heart, “ teach me to say, Not my will, but Thine be done.”

Abra stole to his side, and, slipping her hot little hand in his, stood for some moments in silence.

“ Has He taught thee to say it, father ? ” she asked at length, in an awed whisper.

Hilary turned and folded her in his arms. “ Yea, my beloved,” he said ; “ He hath taught me not only to say those blessed words, but to yield my precious treasure to Him who spared not to give His only begotten Son for me. Let us return to seek thy mother, my Abra.”

The cloudless glory of the setting sun flung its golden beams into Abra’s pleasant chamber, through the open casement floated the cooing of the happy doves, while, from vases of orange flowers and stephanotis, a delicious perfume floated through the room.

Abra sat among her pillows, surrounded by her dear ones. Her white, flowing garments, the unearthly radiance on her face, the brightness of the sunshine, and the flowers and their perfume, seemed rather to suggest a bridal chamber, than one so swiftly to be shadowed by the presence of death.

"O father," murmured the dying girl, "if this is death it is not hard to die—it is all joy—joy. I have only one unfulfilled desire left."

"What is that, my precious one?"

"I would fain see Phaco once more."

"He will doubtless be here immediately, for he hath, I rest assured, been travelling night and day since he received thy message. Ah! here he comes!"

And as Hilary spoke, there was a slight rustle in the curtain over the doorway, and with a soft rapid tread, Phaco approached Abra's bedside.

But how changed! The proud, imperious expression, the lines of haughty selfishness, the almost cruel gleam in the eagle glance, had all fled for ever from that still handsome countenance, and in their place shone forth the traces of a humble, chastened spirit and an almost childlike faith.

"Abra," he murmured softly, as he bent over her and reverently imprinted a kiss on the wasted hand she had extended to him. "How little have I deserved such love as this. Not only hath my Lord forgiven me my black sins, but He hath granted to me the desire of my soul in thus letting me look upon thy face once more."

Abra did not speak. The gaze with which she regarded the transformed countenance above her needed no words to express her joy.

"Tell me, Phaco," she said at length, in a low, weak voice, "what first led thee to the blessed Lord?"

"It was some words, my beloved, that thou didst once give to me from thy father's writings——"

Hilary started and smiled.

"—but which at the time I only kept because thy hand had transcribed them."

"Repeat them to me, Phaco."

"The Lord hath made the way to Himself so easy for the penitent soul that sinners have only to come to Him and He will give them the comfort of His pardon.¹ To pray in tears is the voice of penitence, and God hath promised forgiveness to the seeking sinner throughout His word; He loves each sorrowful soul who comes to Him. This is the only way of pardon to the sinner, to come to Him, Who delighteth not in sacrifices, but Who hath said a broken and a humble heart He will not despise."²

Abra turned to her father: "O my father, how I bless thee for those precious words. Phaco, wilt thou ever proclaim them to others?"

"I will, my Abra, it is my one desire to give my whole life for the spread of the knowledge of the truth I formerly so wickedly, so blasphemously, sought to hinder."

"Amen," said Abra softly. "Father, I would

¹ St. Hil., *Pict. Epis., Opera*, Dom Coustant, 43.

² *Ibid.* 42.

that all might unite in that sweet hymn we sang at our beloved friend's baptism—the beautiful *Te Deum*—my heart is so full of joy and praise that I would fain join in it, albeit, with silent lips.”

Claudiola, the happy tears streaming down her cheeks, had stolen to her son's side. He turned to her with a loving smile, and made room for her to stand beside him.

At a glance from Rhoda's eyes towards the group of retainers and servants crowding inside the doorway, Rufus advanced and whispered in the ear of Franco, the foremost of the group ; the peasant for a moment bent his head, and then his beautiful, clear tenor broke forth into the Church's glorious hymn of praise for all ages : “ We praise Thee, O God, we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord.”

Other voices, one by one, joined in, while Abra lay with shining eyes, mutely joining in the beautiful ascription of thanksgiving. Higher and higher rose the chorus of those trembling yet rejoicing voices : “ The glorious army of martyrs praise Thee.”

The radiant expression on that sweet dying face deepened :

“ When Thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death Thou didst open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.”

Hilary rose and raised his hand, and a sudden hush fell upon the room, for the golden gates had unclosed and Abra was in Heaven.

There remains little more to tell. Almost immediately after the departure of his precious child to the eternal mansion above, Hilary and his household removed to their new home. The bishop with his own hands embalmed the lovely remains of his daughter, and prepared her body for burial within the vault, he had built, adjoining his future residence.

Rhoda did not long survive the death of her child, and ere many months had passed, the mortal elements of mother and daughter lay side by side.

The bishop lived to see the great desire of his heart accomplished, in the existence of a spirit of greater love and fellowship between the Eastern and Western Churches. He died on the 13th of January in the year 366—eight years after the death of Abra.

The future career of Martin is too widely known to be detailed here ; among all the shining qualities of this man of God, there remained much to regret in the development of those narrow and morose characteristics which had appeared in his earlier years.

Shortly after the death of the beloved companion of her girlhood, Concissa was united to the godly and noble Colfurnius, and in course of years became the happy mother of a large family of girls ; but the crowning joy of her married life arrived when her last born child proved to be a boy, and as the rejoicing mother clasped her babe to her breast, little did she anticipate that time of bitter sorrow when her little Patrick, the son of her love, in all the budding

promise of his future greatness, should be snatched from her by ruthless, pirate hands—and yet the day was to arrive when the bereaved parents were to read into this darkest sorrow of their life, the golden thread of God's purpose of love for His people.

Claudiola lived for many years, alike beloved and respected by all, and a beautiful monument¹ bearing her name may still be seen in the church where she first confessed her Lord in the waters of baptism.

Rufus, during the latter years of his life, retired from the army in which he had served so faithfully, and permanently settled in the neighbourhood of his beloved friend Hilary. His household, conducted with Novatian simplicity, consisted solely of that worthy couple, Franco and Franca, who survived their beloved master and lived to a good and honoured old age.

Little is known of the future of Phaco.² Occasionally, the report of some noble deed of heroism or burning act of Christian zeal reached the ears of his former friends, who always associated such with the name of Phaco.

In after years, when the quiet moonbeams stole through the windows of the little crypt which contained the mortal remains of Hilary and his family, they often rested upon an old man kneeling, with bowed head but rapt face, beside the tomb of Abra of Poictiers.

¹ See Appendix, 25.

² See Appendix, 26.

APPENDIX

1. In Dom Coustant's (or, as some writers style him, Dom Coutant's) *Vita Hilarii*, the name of Hilary's father—Francarius—alone is given; the names, therefore, bestowed upon the mother and wife of the Bishop of Poitiers in the foregoing pages are imaginary.
2. St. Martin was born in Pannonia, and is thought to have joined the army at about the age of fifteen. His father was a military tribune. It is not, therefore, an unlikely presumption that the city of Tours should have become the arena of the bishop's labours, from the fact that it formed the residence of his father and family in earlier years. Its comparatively short distance from Poitiers might, to some extent—supposing this conjecture to be correct—account for the close intimacy between the two bishops, evidently existing from their youthful days. The names of Martin's parents are unknown; those given to them in this present volume are, therefore, inventions of the Author. With respect to the respective ages of the two friends, many eminent writers consider Martin to have been the senior of Hilary by three years, while others consider the Bishop of Poitiers to have been considerably older than his pupil, which conclusion would appear to be borne out by the date of the birth of St. Patrick, whose mother was sister to St. Martin. It would hardly appear likely that in those days of extremely early

- marriages, Concissa, at the period of her child's birth, would have had a brother fifty-seven years of age.
3. See *Iconographie du Costume*, plate 3 (Jacquemin).
 4. Novatian lived in the third century. He separated from his brethren on the ground of not receiving the lapsed (*i.e.* those who had fallen away in the time of Diocletian's persecutions) into the outward Church. His followers were styled *Cathari*—pure (hence the term puritan)—from the purity of their morals and the simplicity of their manners and customs. That they existed, under their original nomenclature, until the Middle Ages is evidenced by the fact that Leo X., in issuing his famous bull against Luther, commenced with the words *Anathematizant Cathari*. See *History of the Reformation* (D'Aubigné).
 5. There is much controversy as to whether Hilary's wife was or was not instrumental in his conversion. Dean Farrar inclines to the former, Dr. Cazenove to the latter opinion. The Author ventures to consider that the Dean's conclusion is borne out by Hilary in his letter to Abra. See *infra*.
 6. See *Impartial History of the Christian Church*, sect. 6, part 2, chap. 1, by Rev. T. Haweis.
 7. This lady must not be confounded with Constantia, the half-sister of Constantine the Great.
 8. See *Histoire de la Gaule sous l'Administration Romaine* (A. Thierry).
 9. See *Lives of the Early Fathers—Hilary of Poitiers* (Farrar).
 10. These words have been erased by the inquisitors in the edition of *Hil. Opera* lying in the British Museum. There are altogether eleven erasures, by the inquisitors, in this volume—a most interesting but

painful relic of the bigotry and unscrupulousness of the false teaching of the Middle Ages.

11. Hilary's rigorous separation from Jews and heretics became modified in after years.
12. Colfurnius, the husband of Concissa and the father of St. Patrick, was of noble birth. See No. 6 of the *Christian Classic Series*, *St. Patrick* (Rev. C. H. Wright, D.D., Ph.D.).
13. For the controversy on the birthplace of St. Patrick see above. The author was led to select Benoni (Boulogne-sur-mer), situated in the ancient marshy district of Menonia, because this choice seems borne out by the fact that the paternal farm was named *Ænon*, for its much water.
14. Many eminent writers place the dates of the Councils of Milan and Biterra three years later than do more than one of the authors whose names appear in our preface.
15. To these words, Dom Coustant in *Hil. Opera* appends this note: "Hoc Hilarii loco ut confessionem Dei sacerdotibus faciendum explodat"—"In this passage Hilary does away with the making confession to the priests of God."
16. These words are inked over by the hands of the inquisitors in the volume of Hilary's works referred to in the preface. Dom Coustant has also appended a note to them showing that they formed the ground for much controversy among the doctors of the Church in his days.
17. From the words in Hilary's letter to Abra—"tuas litteras"—it would appear that the daughter had written more than one letter to her father during his exile.
18. See *Dictionnaire Universel: Poitiers* (Larousse).

19. See *Iconographie du Costume*, plate 6 (Jacquemin).
 20. Catholic, from Gr. *Kathos*—all; showing that the
the holds
Throughout the whole Church of Christ was for all nations and people, in
 contradistinction to the Jewish Church, which was
 for one family and nation only; hence the folly of
 the term Roman Catholic.
 21. These words occur in Hilary's letter to Constantius
 (styled Augustus). P. 432, *Dom Coustant*.
 22. This kindness was not lasting, for Hilary writes from
 Phrygia that the rivers and mountains were better
 than the Churches and the Christians.
 23. A version of this hymn is given by Dr. Cazenove:—

“Radiant Giver of the Light,
 By whose calm and piercing ray,
 When have flown the hours of night,
 Comes the re-awakening day.

True enlightener of the earth,
 Not like feeble morning star;
 Herald of the sunlight's birth,
 Dimly brooding from afar.

But brighter than the noontide blaze,
 Fount and source of all our day;
 Potent in men's hearts to raise,
 Sparks that ne'er shall fade away.

Framer of the realms of space,
 Glory of the Father's light,
 Teach by treasures of Thy grace
 Hearts to scan themselves aright.

Still the Spirit's aid impart,
 Make no shrines of the Most High
 Lest the arch-rebel traitor's art
 Lure us by its witchery.

Earthly needs of life entail
 Daily cares without, within ;
 Make Thy precepts still prevail,
 Guide us through them free from sin.

Lawless passion's force repress,
 Purity of heart bestow,
 E'en our mortal bodies bless,
 Thy Holy Spirit's shrines to grow.

Thus the prayerful soul aspires,
 Such its votive gift to Thee,
 Trusting that Thy mornlit fires
 Serve for nightly custody."

The above is the oldest Latin hymn to which a name has been attached. *Hilary of Poitiers*, p. 174 (Cazenove).

24. This house of St. Hilary, with the crypt adjoining, is still to be seen in the town of Poitiers.
25. The Author has ventured to identify the mother of Phaco with the noble Roman lady Claudiola Varenilla, whose monument may be seen in the Baptistery of St. Jean at Poitiers.
26. While the personality of Phaco is historical, his name and career are inventions.



